

The pages that follow are the impressions gleaned from participating in as much of the second assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Plenary Council of the Catholic Church as was possible for a non-member to do.

It is called Plenary Pendulum because Pendulum was something also starting with P, but which also spoke to the ever changing flow of the second assembly, sometimes for joy, sometimes bemused, sometimes aghast.

### **Plenary Pendulum 4 July 2022**

The second and final assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council of Australia began yesterday with an evening Mass at the shrine of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop in Mount Street, North Sydney. No one knows how this week of deliberations and voting on motions will go. However, all kinds of political tactics will be in play, and it could easily get acrimonious. Political machinations that weren't possible last time because it was held online will be out in force this time since it is being held in person.

I am going to try and share the most prominent of my impressions from what the general public is permitted to participate in, and to do so each day until the final Mass on 9 July 2022.

At this point I have watched the opening Mass of 3 July, the livestreamed first session on 4 July and the Plenary Tracker video from 3 July, and I have read as many articles in the Catholic Press and from blogs as possible.

That there were more than 600 amendments to the motions put forward, and only a handful of those will be put to the vote is of concern. Some compilation of the general gist of those proposed amendments would have been very welcome. Likewise, the agenda of the steering committee is unknown, and what those collective desires are will definitely influence which interventions are chosen for presentation prior to the voting and which will only be viewed by those Plenary Council members who make a special effort to view them on an online portal. Some of the interventions we might see if they are shared with the Catholic Weekly and published online. Otherwise we pew-sitters have to wait for the Acts of the Plenary Council to be published – and there is no data yet available for how many copies will be made, and whether or not it will be published online as well as on paper.

We've already seen some of the agenda of the liturgy committee in the drafting of prayers of the faithful, the selection of hymns for Masses, and in how the smoking ceremonies and welcome to country rites have been conducted.

I have already cringed many times. Ciboria are supposed to be made of noble materials. Seven candles are the official limit of lit candles, and only when a bishop is present. There were 9 lit candles at the first Mass, and the ciboria looked like they were made of either wood or pottery, and without any hints that there might be gold lining to them. It also seemed less than ideal to have two non-Australian cardinals on the sanctuary with the Apostolic Nuncio, and to not introduce them, or at least acknowledge their presence.

This morning the cringes induced blushes. As the first session opened no microphone was given to those doing the smoking ceremony and welcome to country. Even with the sound up very high, insufficient words could be discerned to get a gist of what the speakers were saying. When even the lady signing for the hearing impaired, who is on site, can't distinguish enough words to sign them, it has to be bad! Then the lighting of the candles was a disorganized mess. We definitely were not putting our best foot forward before the nation and before worldwide observers. How many people saw this and washed their hands of the whole affair?

Sadly it didn't stop there. I almost wished we had the slickly produced prayer services from the first assembly back. There was space on the livestream screen to show the overhead screen with the words to the songs, but it wasn't used. After that the visuals started to misbehave, and we were able to see about one frame every 10 frames. Not to be outdone, some of the later videoclips had the sound preceding the text. It was strange to have what seemed to be a lay person read a passage from the Gospel in the midst of a plethora of deacons, priests and bishops. But to crown it all, the screen went to the screensaver for 30 minutes while small group discussions went on. Just as well I didn't view it live and could fast forward that bit. If you needed ultimate proof that the

powers that be couldn't care less about the online viewers, that was it. No wonder so many people have become disengaged from the whole process.

The first assembly also had the same disregard for pew-sitting participants.

It would have been far more fruitful if the interventions were livestreamed, at least then we would get the gist of the pros and cons of each motion - and have a chance to grapple with the subject matter, - before the voting results are revealed. Watching procedural motions is far from gripping viewing.

Livestreaming the interventions would have been a far better option for the first assembly too. The quality of the interventions shared via the Catholic Weekly for the first assembly was excellent.

For the Plenary Council to not be a waste of time and money, it has to engage the minds and hearts of the pew-sitters, so that they actively want to be involved in implementing the approved motions. Just if you are leading and no one follows all you are doing is taking a walk by yourself; for the whole church in Australia to move in a specific direction the whole church in Australia has to be engaged. Having the motions written in bureaucratic language hasn't helped. In other parlance, a Plenary Council has to be received. If most people, priests and dioceses ignore implementation of the approved motions, then it hasn't been received.

Efforts have been made to diffuse unpleasantness and importune lobbying.

If I have understood it correctly, the non-bishops vote electronically of an afternoon, the bishops vote the next morning on paper. Clever, isn't it? That way no one will know how any individual bishop voted, even though every non-bishop vote will be attributable. Any flack the bishops get will be therefore shared collectively. But the results of both parts of the voting on the motions will be released at 1pm on the day the bishops vote. Theoretically this means that the non-bishop votes and bishop votes are independent of knowing the results of the other vote. If the outcome of the non-bishop vote was announced immediately after the scrutineers were finished, then it would have been highly likely that the bishops would have been swamped with people who didn't like the way the non-bishop vote went and also swamped with those who wanted to make sure the non-bishop vote was supported by the bishops. It does however give the bishops more time for private debate about the motions during the night hours, and to put together a likely view of the non-bishop vote by sharing with each other the comparative deliberations of the small groups they were part of.

Non-bishop members have been forewarned that should the bishops not vote the same as the non-bishops to not expect any kind of episcopal explanation. Should this happen, frustration and animosity will be the result.

Some mention has been made about the wishy-washy wording of the motions. Missing are any must's and should's. Possibly the thinking is that affirmative votes are far more likely to be achieved if no one feels that implementing the content of the motions will be mandatory. Certainly some of the motions are worded in such a way that 'business as usual' is more than possible.

Ultimately of course no one can force another that they don't want to do – unless they are fairly compensated or persuaded by violence or expected loss of freedoms.

The notion struck me while watching Plenary Tracker that any talk of 'we're going to change the Church' is quite absurd. Only the Holy Spirit has the power and the authority to change the direction of the Church. Unless the Holy Spirit is behind any change, any and all human efforts will be fruitless. As the bible reminds us: Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.

It hasn't been the most auspicious start to the second assembly of the Plenary Council, but I suppose the cave at Bethlehem didn't look too auspicious either. May the Holy Spirit take complete control of all the proceedings.

How could we tell if the Holy Spirit's fingerprints were present? Unanimous votes from both non-bishops and bishops would be indicative. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can produce unity like that.

The highlight thus far was Bishop Macbeth-Green's homily on 3 July about being tired, and how God's peace and the Cross are antidotes for that kind of weariness.

### **Plenary Pendulum 5 July 2022**

The second and final assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council of Australia is now well into the swing of things. Since the last blog-post I have watched the Ukrainian Eastern Rite Mass from last night, and the Plenary tracker episode from last night, as well as blogs today 5 July 2022, the livestreamed morning session, the official press briefing recorded last night and released this morning, and the results of the first full day of voting.

May God help me to get everything churning inside me out in writing.

Musings about how 'Yes with reservation' votes would be counted were answered today. They won't be recorded as Yes votes, nor even as 50% votes. But if the numbers of Yes with reservation votes are of sufficient size, they might become a catalyst for a re-drafting of the motion prior to further voting.

I have to admit I've had the passage in the Gospel where Jesus says, 'say Yes if you mean Yes, and No if you mean No' coming to mind and wondering how come there's a 'Yes with reservations' at all. According to Bishop McKinley the 'Yes with reservations' was used at the Second Vatican Council, and it was used by member bishops to signal that the text was on the right track but needed deeper reflection and modification. Something like, 'headed in the right direction, but currently half-baked and needs work'. I'm now feeling settled about it, but annoyed that such explanations weren't provided in the 29 June working document for the second assembly.

There were some comments on the 3 July Plenary Tracker about how visually confronting it was to see the aisle at the MacKillop shrine divide lay folk from clerical folk. Someone suggested it would be more 'we're in this together' if the seating was mixed rather than segregated. For this there are two answers. The first is the scriptural precedent in both Old and New Testaments for a hierarchical priesthood, with priests separated unto the Lord God to display His holiness. To even suggest mixing it up speaks volumes about our scriptural illiteracy. The second is purely practical due to the processing in and out of the church, the veneration of the altar, and the communion procession. It flows better if they all sit together. Imagine the chaos with vested personages trying to clamber over lay persons to get to the aisle, to do what needs to be done, and then to clamber back over them to resume their seats.

All the first day's motions were passed with two significant amendments, the first amendment being an improvement of language and intent, and the second setting up formal research into why the abuse scandals happened. According to Bishop McKinley such research would not start from scratch but would draw on and expand upon research already done in Australia and from around the world. There was some consensus that the other motions on this sensitive topic were about dealing with what has already happened, and this amendment would go towards improving future outcomes.

One of the Plenary Tracker panelists ventured that the current model of seminary formation is a root cause of the clericalism which is a prerequisite for abuse to happen. Apparently prior to the Council of Trent seminary formation didn't take place in seminaries. But that had sufficient problems for the Council of Trent to do something about it. I do have sympathy with the view of seminary as a hot house for clericalism.

The big topic for today's deliberations is the place of women in the Church. Still issuing from my ears is the steam produced by Sr Clare Condon's presentation this morning. Simplistically her argument was that since baptism gives everyone equal dignity in Christ, and in modern life gender is no longer an obstacle to employment occupation, therefore all roles in the Church should be open to women as well as men. Arrgghhh! God made them male and female, He did not make them androgynous. He made them different for divine reason. The dignity of each is the same, but the roles of each gender are different. As the French say, Vive La

Differance! It is our differences working together that produce the image of God. As this movement towards androgyny and transgenderism gains pace, the birth rate is plummeting. It is the differences between male and female that attract the opposite sex, and keep them attracted, and it's those same differences comprised of complementary gifting which makes long-term team work between a male and a female far more successful than teamwork between two people of the same gender.

Yet I am in sympathy with all those who chafe under a sub-optimal parish priest and under a sub-optimal bishop. The power a priest has to make a lay person's life miserable is enormous. Only the power a bishop has to make a priest's life miserable is greater. As much as I might desire a clerical ombudsman to detail my grievances to, sadly there's no precedent in scripture. It is God's role alone, and His option of choice to deal with clerical reprehensibility is to send a prophet.

Perhaps the answer lays in begging the Holy Spirit to raise up prophets, and to back that up with resources for giving those with nascent prophetic charisms the teaching and wisdom distilled by the Church over the centuries about the guidelines for use of the charism and growth in the charism.

But I also can't escape another biblical precedent. Israel flourished whenever it had a wise and holy leader. It strayed from God's ways whenever the leader was worldly rather than godly. Could there be a relationship between the current state of the Catholic Church in Australia and the number of bishops answering to the description coined by Philippa Martyr, 'bishop bland'? Could an answer be for all the non-episcopal members of the Plenary Council to pray over all the episcopal members of the Plenary Council before the second assembly ends, praying for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be released afresh over each one of them? A secondary idea would be to also pray over all the non-episcopal clerical members of the Plenary Council - because many of them are likely to be future bishops.

The voting process of the bishops this morning was nothing short of a shemozzle. Somehow I had it in my mind that they'd all go off to a smaller room than the great big hall, or go into a voting area just before they entered the big hall. This handing out voting papers in such a haphazard way, and then getting the bishops, most of whom are plus or minus aged 70, to negotiate through the crowded tables to the voting baskets and back again – it can't continue. Those voting remotely could do so in the same pre-first session timeslot.

Back to the actual voting. All of the votes had either No votes or Yes with reservation votes. I want to know why they didn't vote Yes. I have in mind the way the Supreme Court of the United States operates, providing both a majority opinion and a dissenting opinion. Both are equally valuable. Even if the dissenting reasons have to be given anonymously, we still need to know what they are.

And we still need to find solutions to address the concerns underlying those dissenting reasons.

Two experiences have convinced me of this. The first is how many of my dissenting opinions regarding a building project have proved to be real – witnessed by many users of the building complaining about exactly the same things that concerned me, and might I add on a regular basis by both locals and visitors. The second is a narrative told me about an event in a local protestant parish. Their previous youth minister had moved on, and they needed a new one. A wise facilitator got the decision makers together and asked them to describe the qualities they thought were essential for a youth leader in that parish. This would help the decision makers sort through the applications made for the job. A short list was made, and pros and cons of each candidate were discussed. Having the list of qualities needed helped enormously. Then the wise facilitator took another step, it was really important that there be unanimous agreement upon the candidate selected because when the Holy Spirit guided the Church in the Acts of the Apostles their decisions were unanimous. A vote was taken and the result was almost unanimous. The facilitator then asked questions of the objectors. They were very practical and thoughtful objections. Some were easily solved, others like how on earth are we going to pay for the salary of this new minister were less easily solved. But under the facilitators guidance they worked out a solution to that too. Now 100% of the decision makers agreed, and they also a much better outcome than if the trouble hadn't

been taken to sort out the objections. The choice of which candidate to become the new youth minister proved to be an excellent one, and this person served with distinction for many years.

I almost didn't view the press briefing, but I am now glad I did because the journalists asked good questions and the panel of members provided useful answers. In particular, the way the panel shared about the dedication of the members to their momentous task and the depths of unity and relationship being felt by the members has settled my heart, since this seems to be evidence that the Holy Spirit is involved. May His felt presence continue and become ever stronger.

The absolute treat of the last 24 hours was the Ukrainian Eastern Rite Mass at St Mary's Cathedral. It was my first opportunity to witness this version of the liturgy of St John Chrysostom, and worth every moment. Throughout the whole rite the emphasis on the two big truths hammered out at the early Church Councils was present, that God is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Note both the two candlesticks, one with 2 candles and one with 3 candles, and how many non-candle blessings had two fingers on one hand and three fingers on the other. Even though it wasn't easy to translate the liturgy from its usual surroundings to a western rite sanctuary, they did an amazing job to share the beauty and wonder that this liturgy evokes. To me the message came through loud and clear, 'This is My Church. I am God Almighty, more loving and more powerful than you can possibly comprehend. Don't mess with My will for My Church.' My hope is that many members heard that message too, although some of the Plenary Tracker panel brushed it off.

The same Plenary Tracker panel members who are also Plenary Council members seem to be brushing off increasingly pointed official hints that forceful lobby groups are not wanted at the second assembly.

Stay tuned for more spleen venting tomorrow.

### **Plenary Pendulum 6 July 2022**

The second and final assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council of Australia is now at the half-way mark. Since the last blog-post I have watched the Mass for the Unity of Christians from last night, and the Plenary tracker episode from last night, as well as blogs today 6 July 2022, the livestreamed morning session, and the results of the second full day of voting.

There is so much to deal with, may God give me sufficient grace to do justice to all of it.

After yesterday's comments about God's ombudsmen being His prophets, a further notion came into view: It was when the leaders of Israel had good working relationships with the prophets that the best results happened. When prophets and leaders are in alignment with each other and with God effective battle strategies are given and implemented, warnings of enemy raids are received and acted upon – and God's people flourish. We need to actively encourage those the Holy Spirit has bestowed charisms of prophecy upon, especially those called by God to speak truth in His name to power.

I had let some issues pass through to the keeper from the goings on prior to the Opening Mass. But with the content of this morning's prayer service that is no longer possible.

Let's start with some uncomfortable truths and a reminder that it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the sovereignties and the powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army in the heavens. (Eph 6:12)

In Jeremiah 44:16-19 there is a confrontation between the followers of the Lord God and the followers of a female goddess called the queen of heaven. Forsaking the Lord God was an act of rebellion. The followers of this goddess refused to listen to God through the prophet Jeremiah. Behind every god or goddess is a demon. The worship of this particular goddess continues in our day through parts of the new age movement and in the worship of the earth mother. It includes a refusal to call God 'Father'. Depicted as a woman with many breasts, it

had women as high priests and had healing rituals with the female principal, archetypes. That kind of worship usually includes witchcraft and harlotry. The demons behind female goddesses are among the strongest in existence. But the Lord wants to give His people victory. To disarm and to expose the evil powers, is part of the Christian calling to extend the kingdom of God. If you want the glory of God to return, and evangelisation to be effective, then the evil forces behind the various forms of earth mother worship must be dealt with.

The first nations people are a spiritual people and they are acutely aware of the ongoing battle between the good spirit and the evil spirits. Some first nations were more open to the Holy Spirit and some first nations were more open to evil spirits, particularly those associated with the earth mother entity. That's why all first nations rituals and practices need to go through a discernment process, so that only those inspired by the Holy Spirit become enculturated.

The line between what is of the Holy Spirit and what is not of Him got crossed several times this morning at the prayer service, and it was also crossed several times before the Opening Mass began on Sunday. This needs to be officially repented of.

At minimum, could we be specific and always use Holy Spirit and not the shortened 'Spirit', please?! There's good reason why the Church insists on the title Holy Spirit. That way there's no doubt at all about which Spirit is being invoked.

Which gets me started on the 'let's permit the spirit of the land to enter into us and flow through us', or 'calling upon creation, breathe in the land and let it flow through us'. That terminology is not referring to the Holy Spirit! Anything not of the Holy Spirit is spiritually dangerous stuff. The context was in drawing upon sources, but shouldn't the deep riches we call upon be the Bible and the lived tradition of the Church and its magisterium throughout Christian history?

Bishop Bosco Puthur's homily on 4 July 2022 is instructive, especially this excerpt:

"The conditions given for receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit are that we love God and keep God's commandments. Do we really love Him? Do we follow the Lord's commandments, or are we making new commandments influenced by the spirit of the world? Are we incapacitated to receive the Holy Spirit promised by the Lord because we are so consumed by the spirit of the world?"

Such worldliness includes all the popular issues of our day which do not conform to the Gospel. Feminism, relativism, transgenderism, and all the 'if it feels good do it' philosophies are aspects of that worldliness.

Back to procedural matters. There was an intervention this morning from the steering committee about voting on matters liturgical. Since some motions today will have to with specifics pertaining to the Latin rite liturgy (a.k.a. Western rite, Roman rite, Novus Ordo), the Eastern Rite bishops will not vote on these motions. Therefore they will abstain from voting on those specific motions. Now this brought to light that all the Plenary Council members could abstain from voting on any motion. This was news because I thought we were all under the impression that voting was mandatory. Unfortunately, further clarification was not given upon whether the two-thirds majority required was on a baseline of all eligible voters or on a baseline of total of actual votes excluding abstentions.

Bishop Hurley's homily last night explained how ecumenism is an imperative because every missing piece in the Body of Christ jigsaw matters. We are incomplete without the missing ones, and each jig-saw piece gives context and meaning to the surrounding jigsaw pieces.

The big debates today were on two topics; about women in the Church and about whether the term LGBTQIA+ should be used in a specific motion or instead language less targeted and wider ranging.

The latter is easier to deal with, it's a choice between explicitly naming all sub-groupings of persons and risking missing some out; or using less targeted language which encompasses everyone in a general way. It's one of

those arguments you can see both sides of. Possibly if that multi-lettered term was less politically charged it wouldn't have been an issue.

I've read through the motion about the role of women in the Church as it was voted upon, and I can see why it didn't obtain a two-thirds majority in either vote. It tried to do too much. If that big motion had been packaged into four smaller motions, some of them would have been approved. It is a great pity that resolutions concerning adequate remuneration were not in a separate motion. Although many felt like the failure to get a two-thirds majority was a slap in the face, in reality most of that motion was half-baked and needs a lot more work before the implications of implementation of every part of that motion are understood well enough for general approval to be reached. The numbers who voted Yes, even though they were insufficient, should be seen as an encouragement to keep working at it until it is fully baked.

There was also an amendment which failed to pass, something along the lines of an acknowledgment of the hurts and frustrations of womenfolk in the Church. I can see why this one didn't pass too. Firstly, not all women in the Church are exasperated to the same extent as those who drafted the amendment, if at all. Secondly, such acknowledgement is as fraught with implications as getting a government to say sorry to first nations people. Additionally some members may have felt that the hurts and frustrations were self-evident and/or lacking the future looking aspect required for inclusion in a Plenary Council motion. Sadly some members took this failed amendment quite personally, and the most obvious reasons for not getting it approved have nothing to do with misogyny.

I think the rest is going to be rebuttal of some of the discussion in the Plenary Tracker unless I remember something else.

I found myself getting increasingly angry with the general use of the terms inclusion and exclusion without references to specifics. There is a very big difference between inclusion/exclusion from the Mass, from the parish community, from receiving Holy Communion, from being a parish council member, from being a candidate for ordination, from enrolment of children in Catholic schools, and many other things. Each has very different terms of reference.

Comment was made about how inclusion was going so well in schools, hospitals and social services, so how come it isn't going so well in the rest of the church? There's a simple answer. When it comes to hospitals and social services, if you are in need, you get helped. When it comes to schools, if you agree not to rock the boat too much when we get a bit Catholic, come on in, we'll take your money and enroll your child.

Absolutely everyone is welcome to attend a Mass, or any other kind of prayer. Obviously if your intent by attending is to conduct a protest, you won't be welcome. Ditto if you significantly interfere with the ability of people to participate in the Eucharist by screeching, demanding money in a loud voice or otherwise making a scene.

Receiving Holy Communion however is a completely different ball-game. By receiving Holy Communion you are reaffirming that you believe all that the Church believes and teaches and that you are committed to living completely according to those beliefs and teachings. Why? Because being in communion requires both love AND truth. Ask a divorced person about what happened to their marriage, and 'we were no longer being honest with each other' will be part of that explanation. If you have ever accompanied someone going through the R.C.I.A. programme (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) or read testimonies about someone's R.C.I.A. experience, you will see a common theme of the struggle to be able to say with sincerity 'I believe all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches'. Only when that milestone is reached does immediate preparation for the sacraments of initiation begin.

When it comes to receiving Jesus in Holy Communion the Church takes things deadly seriously. Jesus is giving His whole self to us; our response has to be giving our whole self to Him – nothing less is appropriate. Even though the Church looks like a bit of a bully it is a protective stance, not an exclusive one. The Church takes 1 Cor 11:28-

30 very seriously. “Everyone is to recollect himself before eating this bread and drinking this cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognizing the Body is eating and drinking his own condemnation. In fact, that is why many of you are weak and some of you have died.”

Where the rub comes for many is that Church teaching expects chastity according to state of life for all its members. That’s right. Sexual activity only between a husband and wife, and not acting upon their sexual inclinations for everyone else. Yes again, being Catholic isn’t easy, it isn’t for wimps.

Admittedly asking probing questions of each other is not normative unless it becomes unavoidable, or some public scandal has occurred. Don’t ask, don’t tell, is standard operating procedure, with the caveat that even if none of the rest of us knows, God does know, and if a sacrilegious communion is made, there will be God-initiated consequences and they will be unpleasant in the here and now, and most definitely in the hereafter.

Remember, during those times in your life that you are unable to make a sacramental communion, you can make a spiritual communion either according to an approved form or in your own words expressing the desire for sacramental communion and asking for Jesus to visit your soul spiritually because at this time you are unable to receive Him sacramentally. Don’t set spiritual communion at low account, great Saints have made a comparison between sacramental communion and spiritual communion as between gold and silver.

The Jesuit present at last night’s Plenary Tracker made some pertinent points. Councils are important and necessary, but change is a lot longer process than that. Historically some changes have taken 200 years to be accepted by the Church on a world-wide basis. Change normally doesn’t originate in Councils but from mavericks like Blessed Frederick Ozanam who founded the St Vincent de Paul society, like the youngsters in Melbourne who began driving a van with soup and sandwiches to the homeless, like St Francis of Assisi who founded the Franciscans not because he wanted to but because so many people wanted to live the kind of life with Jesus that he pioneered.

Somehow, we have to give up the notion that all discrimination is negative discrimination. There are very good reasons why we only permit qualified electricians to fix electrical problems. There are very good reasons why you have to be over a certain height to go on some fairground rides.

We have significant precedents in salvation history that despite living on elbow rubbing terms with cultures that had priestesses, only the male descendants of Aaron could become priests in Israel and Jesus only had His chosen Apostles, all male, at the Last Supper when the Eucharist was instituted. Women can choose to rant and rave about this to God and to everyone else, or they can re-read the passage about the thorn bush in Judges 9:7-15 and perhaps conclude that leaders accept leadership because they’re not productive at anything else – dear sisters, please take stock of those things you have excellence in doing, and happily continue to do those things. Accept that as St Paul says we can’t all be eyes in the Body of Christ, we can’t all be arms, there are things that you dear sisters can do that are absolutely necessary and that no one else can do. Just because a kidney is hidden and unseen and not as out there and visible as a mouth, when it comes to keeping the body alive and healthy - the kidney is far more essential.

I fully sympathise with all grievances about priestly ineptitude, gaslighting and high-handed behaviour. But Chesterton speaks true when he says in *What’s Wrong With the World*, ‘We all admit that a lazy aristocracy is a bad thing. We should not by any means all admit that an active aristocracy would be a good thing. We all feel angry with an irreligious priesthood; but some of us would go mad with disgust at a really religious one.’ In other words, yes, it is bad, but it could be a lot worse; be careful what you wish for.

But we can’t hold onto our well-earned grievances. Not if we want to pray ‘forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us’ authentically. Forgiveness is a non-negotiable. By golly gosh it is hard to do, but if we look at the crucifix and at Him who died as much for me as for the person who has hurt me, and see that Jesus wants us both to be reconciled to Him and to each other – it becomes easier. Ask for the grace to



forgive, if necessary ask others to join you in seeking that grace. We can't possibly be witnesses to His kingdom of love and mercy unless we are loving and merciful in our own lives.

In late breaking news, somehow the Plenary Council is going to divide the motion on women in the church into small parts and vote on each separately. That seems a tall order given how pressed for time the timetable already is. Perhaps they might not be having as much time off on Friday as they thought – since I can't see any other way of squeezing it in and giving each part due consideration.

What will tomorrow bring?

### **Plenary Pendulum 7 July 2022**

The second and final assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council of Australia is still at the half-way mark, following a disruptive but seemingly fruitful day on 6 July. Since the last blog-post I have watched the Mass for the Church from last night, and the Plenary tracker episode from last night, as well as many religious blogs from 6 July and 7 July, and the livestreamed morning session. Due to the events of yesterday I didn't expect any voting results to be released at 1pm, so I didn't go looking for them.

The first official media briefing I was aware of happened on Monday evening and was published on YouTube. I kept looking for more media briefings, in the obvious places, and found nothing until I heard a remark about Archbishop Coleridge talking to the press. Eventually I looked at Facebook, and on the Plenary Council page found two official media briefings published via Facebook live. It makes no sense to me either. But both Tuesday's and Wednesday's media briefings were worth viewing, which I did back to back last night.

One of them mentioned the wording of the welcome to country from Tuesday morning, which was particularly good:

"We pay respect to elders past, present and their youth, as they hold the dreams of the future. I also extend that respect and acknowledgment to all of you today and the lands from which we're all gathered, and also to your ancestors and where you've come from as well."

Archbishop Coleridge re-quoted from his ACBC homily of 27 Nov 2018:

"According to the papal preacher Raniero Cantalamessa, "ordination provides the authorization to do certain things but not necessarily the authority to do them. It assures the apostolic succession but not necessarily apostolic success". It's the Spirit who provides the authority and the success."

The point being that apostolic success is dependent on people with the right charisms of the Holy Spirit collaborating together on the right projects. Just because someone is ordained doesn't mean they have charisms of preaching, pastoring and administration. Since the gifting of charisms depends on baptism (and confirmation) and not ordination, recognition of this could be the path forward for new governance models and the role of women in the church.

One of the outcomes from yesterday is an understanding that the Yes with reservations is suitable for collaborative votes, but it is not suitable for deliberative votes. Reading between the lines, one has to wonder whether all the bishops were listening when the assembly was told Yes with reservation votes would be counted as No votes. Because a special meeting of bishops was held behind closed doors, we are not privy to why some of them voted No and some of them voted Yes with reservations.

Another outcome from yesterday is that Motion 4, the one about women in the church, will be adjusted by a panel of 4, two members and two experts, and then the votes on that revised motion will be held on Friday.

Subsequently the two motions that didn't get dealt with yesterday have to be squeezed in between today and tomorrow. But even that has necessitated a better outcome. Decisions have been made to make the time set aside for spiritual conversations shorter, more streamlined and focused on the motions; and a more iterative

and real-time consultative process has been sketched out for the rest of the second assembly, with each motion taking as long as it takes to get it right – or so we hope.

In last night's Plenary Tracker Mary Coloe had useful input. She reminded us that there are parts of discernment that happen before a decision, and there's discernment that happens after a decision. When a decision is made and general discomfort results, like happened yesterday, then general agreement is that the wrong decision was made and a better one needs to be found. It is quite normal that sometimes discernment is clearer after a decision is made.

I feel I need to declare that many of the conclusions made by John Warhurst in his media release at 6.39pm yesterday don't hold water; and will go through some of them in detail. I accept that it was probably written in haste, and under strong emotions, and used provocative language like 'failure, desperately, stunning blow' etc, and which he will likely regret writing for a long time to come.

The vote was not a failure to give unqualified recognition to women in the Church. Actually the motion was too big and too unwieldy. Even the large number of Yes with reservations votes from the non-bishops bears out that truth.

I can't see how a rejection of contemporary values matters at all. Ditto 'reflecting the will of the people'. We believe in a God, as James 1:17 says, with Whom there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change. It is His will, and His will alone that we desire to discern and implement. Finding ways to express that holy will which enable each culture and epoch to take that holy will on board is the perennial challenge of the Church throughout the ages.

Warhurst wrote 'the church desperately needs women in leadership roles at a time with the number of male priests is draining away'. Women in leadership roles has absolutely nothing to do with the numbers of male priests, absolutely nothing. The sense I've picked up from many plenary council members on this topic is that this is far more about baptismal dignity and opportunities for collaboration in decision making than anything else. That there are women in rural and remote areas who are undertaking various pastoral tasks and desire to be included in decision making regarding those under their care is the issue, not that the situation is due to absence of priests in those areas.

He also wrote the following which seems patently unfair: 'But it is the refusal of many bishops to consider discussing with women the creation of women deacons – should Pope Francis authorise such a ministry – that is so disheartening'. That this part of the motion is even on the table, approved by both steering committee and drafting committee for deliberation, and not expunged after amendments to the draft motions were sought is prima facie evidence that the bishops are more than happy to discuss and debate this part of the motion.

Warhurst also frames the non-approved vote as 'a blow to hopes raised that in the wake of the disastrous child sexual abuse royal commission that promised church reforms that would mean no more "business as usual" '. If you think by the mere placement of women in decision making bodies the conditions for future abuse evaporate – have I got news for you! For abuse to happen, and for abuse to continue, there is a degree to which women are enablers viz young woman goes to older woman to report abuse from a significant person in the older woman's life, and the initial and perhaps ongoing response is disbelief. It happens. Putting women in decision making positions is not going to stop abuse. Some argue that having a woman present will reduce clericalism, but we've all seen clericalized women, with paid professional careers in diocesan curia and similar places and their job description/allegiance is to bishop and curia, not to pew-sitters and whistle blowers.

The non-approved vote on motion 4 does not mean it will be 'business as usual' after the second assembly ends. That's grossly unfair. To have even had these discussions at plenary council level and to have had broad consensus, as evidenced by between half and two-thirds voting Yes at both consultative votes and deliberate votes, means that business will most definitely not be 'as usual'. Through all the sharing and listening, as

uncomfortable and intense as it has sometimes been, there has been a massive shift in collective thinking. How that works itself out in practice – it's too soon to tell – but to deny that it has happened is unjust.

Compared to previous days, online commentary has been abundant. Whether that's because of today's controversies or because it has taken this long to get a sense of how the second assembly is going, or both, is up for debate. Daniel Ang and Philippa Martyr have made excellent written contributions to the wider discussion, and I'll now present some of them, two from each, albeit they are paraphrased and edited.

Daniel Ang. 6 July. Edited.

Tensions within the Council are not only the result of issues with the process of the Council itself but also with the distinct ecclesiological imaginations at play among members - with at least two primary dialects evident on the Council floor. One dialect focusses largely on the outward organisation or 'form' of the Church and the re-distribution of its goods. The other sets its focus upon the inner life of faith, on the common need for conversion and the call to evangelisation.

History has shown us that when the organisation and practical actions of ecclesial bodies lose contact with the Catholic tradition, its teachings and sacramental life, they not only diminish but ultimately disintegrate.

Philippa Martyr. 7 July. Paraphrased and edited.

As a woman with work and study commitments, with care commitments to elderly parents and to a teenager, it wasn't possible for me to become a Plenary Council member because I didn't have months to spend with 'gifted sharers of their personal journeys'. In the absence of ordinary people like me, a group of privileged women and their man friends have tried to impose their pet projects on the Plenary Council.

The papal commission on the diaconate has two broad options. It can uphold Vatican II's understanding of the diaconate as part of a continuum of Holy Orders. This means it's not open to women. Or it can go back to a more primitive understanding of the diaconate. This means uncoupling it from the priesthood altogether, and if ordained at all, ordained in a way that separates them completely from the priesthood.

Lest anyone erroneously think that deacons have any part in diocesan decision making, Bishop Mark Edwards recalled his experience of being a deacon as having no decision making input at all. A deacon's role is to serve the Word of God, to serve the poor, and to do whatever the bishop wants them to do. It's far from glamorous.

Bishop Edwards also shared how a brave table member was willing to call other table members to a higher understanding than the general consensus of opinion. This person shared that evangelisation, is offering someone something precious we have found, it is not focused on getting more rear ends on pews. Facilitating someone's response to Jesus and an encounter with Him has to take primacy; whether or not that leads to them attending some kind of worship in person is up to them.

In one sense it was 'business as usual' on Wednesday evening at Mass. Zero mention was made of any of the tumultuous day that had been. Even though it appears to be standard operating procedure, it is flawed. It is so much better to acknowledge that there has been turmoil, to even offer the opportunity for sign of peace-like gestures of solidarity to each other, and to then invite everyone to leave their cares and concerns behind for this brief hour, and to focus together on God. Ignoring it makes it worse. Ignoring it induces anger.

I did read some commentary expositing that with the explicit mention of public juridic persons in some of the earlier motions that this effectively means that leadership of social services, hospitals, educational institutions etc have a place at the decision making table alongside bishops, clerics and religious. That feels like a sea-change with monumental implications, although no-one would doubt that better collaboration among them would be a very good thing.

There are a few notions from last night's plenary tracker that deserve mention:

Mary Coloe said she'd be quite happy to receive authorization to preach (she does regularly train seminarians in the arts of preaching) and sees no reason why authorization to preach cannot be separated from ordination.

Mary also spoke about the disparity of resources devoted to seminary education compared with resources devoted to non-seminary education. Studying theology at any level, if you are not a seminarian or already ordained, is a voluntary thing, depending on person's interests, ability and the depth of his or her pockets -since it is quite expensive.

Then Genevieve shared from the heart about the many years she has served as a reader at Mass, and how demoralizing it has been to have to accept that her contributions have not been valued because she's been seen as a lesser substitute because a male reader wasn't available. With Pope Francis recently opening up the ministry of lector to women, this has thankfully changed. But the years of hurt remain. Been there, done that, still bear the scars. I stepped down from public proclamation of the scriptures some 20 years ago, firstly due to a perception that I was too visible for some people (when actually it was willingness and ability to step in at short notice), and secondly, because if being a lector was only officially for men, I'd better step down and hope and pray that some men stepped up. I had also noted that when a man speaks publicly the message is unimpeded. When a woman speaks publicly the message is always impeded by what she is wearing, despite her very best efforts to the contrary.

Someone has to lead and someone has to follow, otherwise unified action isn't possible. But is leadership of the first among equals variety, which actively consults on decision making unless dire urgency makes that impractical. That's the kind of leadership that makes marriage, parishes and dioceses work. In biblical and Christian history that kind of community leadership has been given by God to male priests and male elders. Exceptions to that rule, like Judith and Deborah, are quite rare.

Be careful what you attribute to the Holy Spirit. Was yesterday's impasse due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Or was it due to the clout of the C.C.C.G and the emotive language they've been using? Or was it a bit of both? There's been so much whipping up of emotions, and so much, 'we want this or else', that discussion failed at times to be collaborative and became combative. Singularly lacking has been efforts to help those with hurts and grievances to come to peace and healing through forgiving the perpetrators (real and/or perceived) for the sources of those hurts and grievances. True clarity cannot come if there are blockages to love and emotional baggage in the way. Very welcome would be any kind of prayer for healing of hurts, and any gestures of mutual reconciliation- and for first nations as much as for abuse survivors as much as for women and men who carry wounds due to sub-optimal clerical behaviour.

No decisions about us without us: that's women, first nations, disabled, homeless, those with non-standard sexual orientations etc. Sadly that seeking of input from the people affected directly by the decisions has been rare. Witness how often we put in toilet facilities with wheelchair access and then fail to provide any ramps to help those with wheelchairs get to those toilets. This is about moving towards a collaborative model for decision making, and to an extent it is about justice. However we have to acknowledge that the decision making buck has to stop somewhere, and that's the demanding role given by God to the clergy.

Thankfully Archbishop Coleridge gave an answer to why there isn't a 9<sup>th</sup> part in the plenary council considerations about marriage and family. Two reasons were given: One was that compared to the other 8 topics significantly fewer responses from the listening phase had been received about marriage and family. It was also thought that considerations upon marriage and family were more appropriate at a local and diocesan level than at a national level at this time.

Stay tuned for more tomorrow.

### **Plenary Pendulum 8 July 2022**

The second and final assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council of Australia is now at its last full day of deliberations, with many contentious issues still at large. Since the last blog-post I have watched the Mass for the Memorial of Blessed Peter To Rot from last night, and the votive Mass this morning in honour of Mary, mother of the Church,

and the Plenary tracker episode from last night, as well as some religious blogs from 7 July and 8 July, the press briefing from last night, and the livestreamed morning session. I have viewed the revised draft for motion 4 on women, and I looked at the voting outcomes released yesterday. I have not yet gone looking for any voting results released today.

I was pleasantly surprised at the revision of motion 4. There was nothing in it which raised my hackles. Certainly it is a much better motion than the one presented to the assembly on Tuesday.

Daniel Ang's input released 6 July and Sandy Wallace's input released today have caused me to look deeper at the disconnect between what's been going on in the Plenary Council Masses in the Cathedral and what's been going on in the Plenary Council from a plenary tracker perspective – for lack of a better descriptor.

Last night's plenary tracker portrayed a bubble of reality that was quite alien to me. How come there is such enthusiasm about ecological conversion? Could it be that it's because 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is close at hand' is far more demanding? I doubt that the name of Jesus was mentioned more than once at last night's plenary tracker. That really bothers me. The way I heard the panel of women enthuse was uncomfortably like having an alternate religion proposed. Perhaps the troubling thing was a placement of the human person as a cog within the ecosystem of creation – which is very different to God's command, 'Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth'. It was couched in either/or terms, not in both/and terms, and that is very troubling.

But when I look at the number of federal votes for the Greens party and for teal candidates, perhaps I should not be surprised at this green-washing of the life of the Church in Australia.

I keep returning to the notion that if plenary members were more steeped in scripture, in theology, in living the liturgical year, and in frequent and regular use of the sacrament of penance then so many hot button issues would have had minimal support. Daniel's observation of the tale of two councils is ringing true. How can lives more infected with worldliness than with apostolic levels of conversion truly discern? Strangely, I'm now finding myself in sympathy with the previous way of conducting plenary councils – bishops only – because at least they are all coming together with a strong baseline of shared knowledge and practice.

Deeply I fear that the members got it wrong yesterday. Two topics stick in my craw. The first one was making diocesan pastoral councils mandatory for all dioceses, and the second one was signing up all dioceses, parishes, schools, hospitals etc to the Laudato Si program and demanding that it happen by 2024.

My experience of any kind of committee is that ineffective chairmanship is rampant and that effective chairmanship is rare. Chairpersonship was just too much of a mouthful to consider using. Very few parish councils ever accomplish anything worthwhile. Witness the number of parish council members who haven't read the minutes of the last meeting prior to the current meeting. Witness how many accountabilities are treated as suggestions subject to a better offer rather than 'serving as if it was done at God's orders'. Now if instead there had been a motion to invest in widespread training for effective chairmanship – that would be useful. Let's also refresh our memories that if a parish priest doesn't want a parish council and if a bishop doesn't want a diocesan pastoral council, all efforts are doomed to failure. Recall also that it is usually volunteers that are sought for pastoral council positions and that very little effort is usually expended to make sure that there's a variety of gifts among members so that it's not top heavy with dreamers and deficient in doers.

Where or where do you think the limited resources of a parish are going to go if implementing the Laudato Si program has to happen by 2024? How much will be left over for the primary mission of the Church: making disciples of Jesus? Matt 28: 18-20

And so much for not making decisions without the input of stakeholders! According to the approved motion all parishes have to do this, and parishes certainly weren't consulted about the Laudato Si mandate. That's a very different thing to a bishop saying Yes, we will start a few pilot programmes in interested parishes and see how it goes before extending it further.

Were you gobsmacked that one of the ecology motions was unanimous among bishops? I was. Maybe they were tired and didn't fully comprehend the implications of the Yes vote to that motion.

Generally there has been a relatively consistent voting pattern from the bishops with an average of 30 Yes votes and 10 No votes. Only God knows if it has been the same bishops in each voting bucket or whether it has been more fluid. But there was a strange thing happening with motions 7.4 and 7.5 where the No vote was significant and the motions barely passed. That lack of unanimity should have sent both motions 7.4 and 7.5 back to the drawing board, time pressure or no time pressure.

The media briefing was again instructive, answering three important questions.

The first was about the general content of the Rome response to the Light from the Southern Cross document, viz too horizontal and not balanced enough with vertical and a reminder that the Church decision making is very different to the ways businesses and governments do things. The same criticism could be levelled at the plenary council process, yes?

The second was about the risk, due to new research groups, diocesan pastoral councils, and this new three yearly roundtable, of too much new bureaucracy in an already swamped experience of meetings upon meetings upon meetings (Here's looking at you Bishop Umbers). Since if you are tied up in meetings all the time, a pastor or bishop has nothing left in the tank to do pastoral visits to families or to be supportive to a struggling priest. The answer given was that the risk of increasing bureaucracy is always present, and it is the price paid for the chance of some of these new meeting types to actually assist in moving the mission of the Church forward. To which I want to respond, surely there must be other long-shot ventures with more chance of success that we could invest our time, energy and scarce resources in!

The third was a response to the general deflation experienced when reading the framework for motions for the first time, viz after all these years couldn't we have come up with something less bland, less general and more specific? The answer was that since implementation will be across very different circumstances, city, regional, rural, remote, that anything one-size-fits-all doesn't provide enough wiggle room to implement motions creatively according to specific diocesan situations. Additionally members had come to acceptance about the need to have less prescriptive motions.

This morning Bishop Bird widened our concept of Mary as mother of the Church, because we think too readily that church means only the rite we celebrate liturgy with. So Bishop Bird took us through the richness of liturgical prayers in the Latin rite, the Maronite rite, the Chaldean rite, the Melkite rite, the Ukrainian rite and the Syro-Malabar rite. Sincere apologies if I missed any Eastern rite out. The love of Mary as mother and model is deep throughout dioceses as evinced by the numbers of parishes with Marian names, and throughout all the liturgical rites of the Church.

Last night at Mass there was an incredibly bad use of inclusive language in the responsorial psalm, Psalm 33(34). This is the accepted translation: 'This poor man called; the Lord heard him and rescued him from all his distress' – which was on screen. The translation used: 'When the poor cry out the Lord hears and rescues them from all their distress' – which was sung. Any student of language knows that there is a vast difference between singular and plural eg. est and sunt. The former encourages the individual to seek the Lord's help. The latter could be interpreted that God only hears when a group of poor call out to Him, and that being united in prayer is a prerequisite for the prayers being answered. These are vastly different interpretations caused by inclusive language that the literal Hebrew translation cannot support. Shouldn't our fidelity to what the original text of God's Word says take priority over any ideological overlay?

A bright point on Thursday morning was the presentation of a message stick from the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and the explanation of the symbolism of each part of it. Both the forethought to prepare such a gift and visible token of solidarity and the deep understanding of the plenary council process it portrayed were amazing.

Similarly amazing was the explanation by Erica of how much the smoking ceremony meant to her, and why, viz (paraphrased) ‘together we acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who have welcomed us so warmly with the smoking ceremony when we gathered together to begin this meeting on their country. That smoke made me feel safe. It gave me courage and it encouraged me to take part in sharing, especially sharing about our first nations culture’.

Last night Cardinal Dew from Wellington, New Zealand was the homilist at Mass. He has been one of the official observers, and he is adamant that he hasn’t been bored during his observation of the plenary council process. Among his many observations two stood out: increase in faith of the community, increase in communion of the community, and increase in mission of the community is the responsibility borne by each baptised person: discernment is integral to synodality.

When I looked at the plenary council website a little while ago, the results of the voting from today’s deliberations were not yet published.

Stay tuned for a response to that, and to the Mass tomorrow morning, and the wrap up press briefings and plenary tracker episode – although it is likely to be Sunday before that response can be completed.

### **Plenary Pendulum 10 July 2022**

The second and final assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council of Australia has now ended. Since the last blog-post I have watched the closing Mass for the evangelisation of the peoples, the plenary tracker episode from 8 July, as well as some religious blogs from 8 July and 9 July, both press briefings from 8 July and 9 July, and I have read through the results of voting from 8 July.

May God grant me the grace to deal with all of it without missing anything significant.

Even though the prevailing mood from the plenary council members is optimistic, relaxed, and weary or ‘relieved, emotional, and exhausted’ I find myself wondering whether everyone shares that view. Just because all those who appeared on plenary tracker or the media briefings feel this way, it is by no means certain that everyone feels this way. From a few things viewed on Twitter this morning, I dare to hope.

Our bishops have now gone down to somewhere at Mittagong to spend three days together, presumably talking, relaxing, and processing the pressure cooker events of the last week. This mirrors what has now become a mandatory highlight of Australian contingents to World Youth Day: they get together for three days to let what has just happened sink in, to talk and discuss with others who had similar experiences, before they disperse to return to real life. I’d give a lot to be a fly on the Mittagong wall because I suspect these three days will contain a lot of collective soul searching.

At least the press briefings have now all been put up on YouTube, that’s a win; and they are all worth taking the time to view.

However I did wonder whether I’d stepped into an alternate universe when a comparatively younger male member said, ‘there’s a lot of good youth ministry happening in all areas of our Catholic Church’. If by good you mean occasional very showy large gatherings of youngsters, maybe, but there’s no evidence that these extravaganzas lead to the kind of conversion which helps youngsters commit to prayer, to Sunday Mass, to regular Confession, and to the rejection of participation in pre-marital sexual activity. Does the youth ministry as experienced as lots of pizza, ice-breaking games, fund raising for big youth events, and the occasional challenging talk actually minister to young people? It’s really good for youngster-sitting; but for actually ministering to them a la Everett Fritz? No. There’s normally something worthwhile with youth happening in close proximity to cathedrals, but anywhere else it is hit and miss, and out in the boondocks it is miss.

Lots of members have gushed about the morning prayer experiences during the second assembly. Yes, there was a cut down version of the litany of Saints, and the Benedictus got prayed once as did the Hail Mary, and there was a smattering of scripture, but there was a lot of dodgy stuff too. At times I had to force myself to continue watching online. When I came across a member on Twitter this morning to admitted that he walked out while the pagan-esque rituals were going on, (especially planting seeds in mulch) and returned when they were over, I was greatly relieved. How much better it would have been if they had prayed Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours together, in both Latin and Eastern rites!!!

A tale is told from time to time about a long-term family friend born 1930, who, when told that there was to be a second Vatican Council put his head in his hands and wept. As a student of church history, he knew that international Church Councils disrupt the mission of the Church for at least 50 years. At the time he was doing his best as an evangelist and apologist on a soapbox in The Domain.

Deeply I felt in charity with him when a motion was approved to force all Australian dioceses and eparchies to have a diocesan synod within 5 years' time. Haven't we done enough navel gazing during Vatican II and the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Plenary Council? Isn't it time for mission?

10 years ago, a synod was held in Broken Bay diocese. Us pew-sitters were invited to answer a few questions on a sheet of paper. There our involvement ceased. After meetings upon meetings of 'movers and shakers' the Synod was held, and a memorial website set up. Long gone is the website and if any positive outcomes came from the Synod, apart from enhanced relationships between the 'movers and shakers', they were not perceived by me. When the Plenary Council was first announced, reflecting upon that synod, I wondered, 'How could a national version of the same, even if called a Plenary Council, not ultimately be a similar waste of time, talent and money? Any time dedicated to synod preparation, national or diocesan, is time that won't be dedicated to evangelisation or to the needy.

Some motions had 40+ No votes. Now that's really significant opposition! Yet the motions were still approved. Given that normally consensus was extraordinarily high for the two last days of voting, shouldn't these large No votes have given the steering committee pause? Maybe two thirds majority was too low a bar, and it should have been higher, like 80% or 90%. Any motion with 40+ No votes is going to have big trouble at the implementation stage.

Generally the mood of last night's press briefing 8 July was that the new deliberation process went well. But comparing where I expected the bishops to stick up for church teaching, the missing backbone, and the actual votes, I have to wonder whether the new process introduced quite a lot of peer pressure and therefore dissenting voices were discouraged from speaking - just by gazing across the sea of green straw polls and feeling alone. Perhaps it would have been better to have an 'as long as it takes' plenary council instead of the pressure of a time limit?

Further reflection has me wondering three things:

Firstly, the open mike nature of the deliberations of the last two days of the assembly suited the bold and the articulate. It couldn't have possibly suited the introverts and those with hearing aids. This would have skewed the deliberations of the assembly. Surely deliberations need to be from both oral and written sources so that the playing field is levelled somewhat.

Secondly, the votes seemed to happen very soon after the deliberations finished. There was no cooling off period. No time to mull over all the input in the quiet of a private bedroom and weigh everything up more soberly.

Thirdly, how many of the votes were made not according to rational judgement but according to emotion viz, why should I keep to the vote I had intended to make if it seems everyone else has the opposite view? How many deliberative votes were swayed due to fear of hostility from the rest of the room, and from fear of the general public's reactions?



Even juries are sent away to deliberate after closing arguments are made; they don't vote in the court room immediately after closing arguments have been presented.

I've been thinking deeply about this because in a rational world the bishops would have voted against inclusive language in liturgy. Surely they have a reverence for sacred scripture which is peppered throughout the prayers? Surely they cannot have forgotten all the work that went into the re-translation of the Novus Ordo a few years ago, and all of the discomfort churchgoers went through in the adjustment process. In a rational world they'd run a million miles away from going through another revision process so soon. We've all laid out so much money on new missals and lectionaries – and they said Yes to doing it again? So many of our favourite hymns have already been ruined with inclusive language revisions.

I put it to you this way: The re-translation of the Novus Ordo has returned a sense of sacred and repentance to the liturgy. Who wants to wreck that? The good spirit or the evil spirits?

We were treated to some examples of what would become commonplace with inclusive language: There was universal use of 'sisters and brothers'; must we never use 'brothers and sisters' again?

More concerning was the replacement of 'priest, prophet and king' with 'priest, prophet and royal'. Between the concepts of king and royal is a vast chasm. There can only be one king at a court, with responsibility for the welfare of all. At a court are many royals, in various near and far family relationships to the king. Far from minor is this replacement because the triple title is sourced deep in sacred scripture and is the triple role of Jesus we are baptised into. To use 'royal' is to distort the truth.

Let's remember again, who is it who is the Father of all truth distortions?

As commentators have said, maybe our bishops decided to let this one on inclusive language go through to the keeper, and let ICEL and Rome get the flack for saying No.

This isn't the only motion where fear of God should have outweighed fear of man, or fear of woman eg lay preaching at Mass.

I also note that part 9 about implementation had nothing about prioritizing which parts to take precedence. Even a multi-choice online poll of members' views would have been useful and instructive. Clearly it all can't be implemented at once. Some needs to be in the urgent bucket, some needs to be in the important bucket, and some will end up in the if-we-get-to-it bucket.

Comment was made to me that knowing people were so emotional about the many issues up for deliberation, that in the beginning there should have been a time of naming, sharing and releasing hurts and working through reconciliation opportunities before entering into the plenary council process. I whole heartedly agree.

It also befuddles me that having experienced the plenary tracker interplay from the first assembly that the head instigators were not put on notice and told that bad behaviour (ie. non-conducive to collaboration) would not be tolerated.

As I've mentioned before, entering into a plenary council process in a combative mode rather than in a collaborative mode is profoundly insulting to those doing their best to be collaborative.

Therefore I return to the 2 types of people on earth :10 commandments vs 2 commandments people, viz 1. nobody tells me what to do; 2. I don't give a stuff about anyone else. There's a very big difference between those who sing 'we did it God's way' vs those who sing 'I did it my way'. Were we seeing a corporate expression of those 2 commandments viz 1. we want these particular topics to go our way (women, governance, inclusion, LGBTQIA+) and 2. really don't give too much of a stuff about how we obtain those results – as long as we get them - nor about any topics other than these? Deeply concerning it is. Yet I understand only too well how easy it is to get carried away by seemingly righteous anger and passion for apparent injustice, and not realise that a lack of sufficient detachment has permitted darker forces to play unseen puppeteer with your emotions.

I further wonder why, when it became apparent that those in a combative mode were not being collaborative, and in fact were implacably combative, that the leadership did not remove them from the assembly. Granted, they may have kicked up more of a stink outside than inside, but maybe it would have been better to put up with nasty public scenes than to have had the plenary council hijacked by their implacability. Because it was hijacked. Those who screamed loudest got their way, and those who should have had more parental concern for the whole let them. When a young child reaches the age of being able to have tantrums, giving them what they want in order to shut them up just makes a precedent for a higher stake outcomes later down the track. The only way to prevent that is a short sharp smack and some time on the naughty bench.

To understand why this is crucial, here's a crash course in Discernment 101. Usually we have two choices before us, and usually we have a strong preference for one of them. This is particularly so when seeking God's will for our life vocation; marriage or one of the total commitments requiring celibacy. Until we can come to the point, through prayer, study, reflection and discussion of saying, 'God, both choices are good, yes I admit I have a preference for one of them, but I am prepared to wholeheartedly embrace Your choice for me, no matter which one it is, because it is Your choice, and I wish to please You, and I acknowledge that Your choice will bring me the greatest happiness.' Only then can the Holy Spirit move us in His direction. Only then can we know that we are following God's will and not our own. Can you now see that if you come to a discernment process unwilling to relinquish your own strong preferences, that you block the discernment process?

We seem to have only dealt with the push button issues for the progressives at the plenary council. That's sad. Because it has been dangerously inward looking- and failed to do much at all to support evangelisation. If you asked someone in the pews what was urgent for the church my guess is that better homily preaching would be number one. It didn't feature at all in the plenary council. Neither was there anything to do with how laity could better live out the twin calls of holiness and mission in their daily lives at work, play and home. There was nothing about how to be more open to the Holy Spirit; nothing about ways of facilitating encounters with Jesus, nothing to inspire those living in vocations to marriage and family.

A ray of joy is that 'Eparchy', is now being mentioned in Australian Church matters as often as diocese is.

Across social media, whenever the comment function wasn't turned off, there were consistent questions: How did my bishop vote? How much did this whole Plenary Council process cost? Where's the money coming from to fund the new things proposed by the Plenary Council?

In the vast wish-list of the Plenary Council, did everyone forget just how many dioceses are already in financial crisis?

At times members, steering committee and drafting committee struggled under the constraints required by Canon Law for a Plenary Council.

The wisdom from members of religious orders was a gift to the Plenary Council. Their experiences of collective decision making, the good, the bad, and the ugly, reassured everyone else that what they were experiencing in the Plenary Council was not abnormal. When religious meet in chapter, the process is normally 4 to 6 weeks long, and is recognised by congregational leaders that the decision to put something to the vote only happens when a sense of consensus is reached.

Synodality is hard work, and it is a difficult process. Any kind of deep listening and having long cherished preconceived notions challenged generally is.

Some of the wording of Plenary Council motions was imprecise. As some members and commentators asked, who is going to decide what is appropriate and what is not appropriate eg. 'that women are appropriately represented in decision-making structures' 'with appropriate formation and recognition'

If you take the view that the whole plenary council process was tied to an agenda full of woke ideas, or at least politically correct ideas, then are we running the risk of 'Go woke, go broke' and of grave damage to the Australian Church - since God has an eternal perspective, and we only have the prevailing perspectives of this era of society?

One of the younger panel members on the plenary tracker about integral ecology was very enthusiastic and therefore persuasive. Her contribution has continued to niggle at me. If you took away the audio and just looked at the visual, I think you'd be convinced that this was a new convert to something. Problematically that something was not Jesus. So amazing is the Good News that we should be excited about Jesus; and have very little else on our lips. We should beware whenever something less than Jesus takes up our minds and hearts.

Given the number of new research assignments, new roundtables for accountability and resource sharing, and other things that will require staffing – how is it all going to be paid for, given that most parishes are already under heavy obligations for insurance and contributions to diocese? Existing obligations are already crippling. Will the obligation get heavier, or will something that is working get cut for something untested, or both?

The plenary tracker episode of 8 July had a fair amount of discussion about whether the Plenary Council has been a watershed moment in the life of the church in Australia, or whether it was just another small step on an incremental path. It also answered a question: The two thirds majority for voting approval was based on the number of eligible voters; so abstentions, which happened, did make getting to two-thirds a little harder. For all the talk about women deacons, any discussion about the experiences and role of married deacons and their wives was conspicuously missing.

Discernment isn't always yes and no, sometimes, legitimately, it is 'we're not quite there yet'.

One of the press briefing panelists had an interesting view. With the motion to settle outstanding motions from the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Council, it means that we've just had a change of era. The era of the 4<sup>th</sup> plenary council is now over, and the era of the 5<sup>th</sup> plenary council is beginning.

When asked about the notable lack of emphasis on interior conversion during the Plenary Council, Archbishop Costelloe said that the Year of Grace in 2012 which preceded the Plenary Council was thought to have already done that.

He also expressed a hope that everyday meetings in parish and diocesan life will now have more of a focus on 'what is God asking of us at this moment' than heading straight into normal procedural and practical matters.

The Implementation timeline goes like this: all of the documentation from both assemblies will be packaged up over the next few months, it is likely that the November assembly of the bishops' conference will accept it as a true record, then it will be sent to Rome. Then we wait for Rome's response, because anything implemented has to be in communion with the church universal. The implementation phase will only begin on motions that have the green light from Rome. 'Jumping the gun' on implementation risks wasted efforts. Possibly the earliest the response from Rome will be received is May 2023.

There was adoration going on in the crypt area of St Mary's cathedral during the Plenary Council, and many members availed themselves of that opportunity especially during lunch time.

Closing Mass 9 July 2022 excerpts from Archbishop Timothy Costelloe's homily.

There can be no true renewal if we ourselves, perversely, push Christ to the margins.

Our task is to point beyond ourselves to Jesus.

Pentecost is the deep reality of the Church.

Salvation ultimately depends on preachers being sent.

We are not to be concerned with self-preservation but with proclaiming the truth and beauty of the Gospel by what we say and what we do.

The commission to go out and make disciples was not withheld from those whose faith was weak and faltering and caused them to hesitate.

We have experienced this week what it means to struggle with the reality of the call of the Gospel and recognise that the struggle must continue.

There is more to discover about where the Holy Spirit seeks to lead us.

We are sent as witnesses to the love and mercy of God.

The Lord never promised that discipleship would be without its challenges.

What He did promise was that He would be with us always.

How to conclude? It is going to take time to discern what has been of God and what hasn't been of God in the Plenary Council. Unpalatable truth though that be. Currently all we have seen is general euphoria. In reality, this has been the easy part. Now begins, when Rome gives the green light, the task of putting it into practice and discovering which parts work and are accepted, and which parts don't work and aren't accepted, by pew-dwellers and bishops, and everyone in between. My gut feel is that the consensus reached on the floor of the second assembly is far from being a consensus throughout parishes, dioceses and eparchies.

May God have His way. Amen.