

Why Reform the Roman Catholic Church?

Recently, ARCC was asked the question: *why reform the RCC?* More to the point, what is there worth preserving? That question has prompted me to give considerable thought.

There are so many issues that have come up in the recent synods that reflect a desire to reform the Roman Catholic Church. These range from changes to the hierarchy, ordination of women, married clergy, and election of bishops.

To me, these are all part of the most crucial reform of all—a return to our gospel roots, along with a reflection of our times. All these other reforms would spring from this. The current structure and emphasis in the church centers far too much on control. The hierarchy controls the people, the rituals, the finances, and the message.

First of all, the focus should be on relationship not on control. I can demonstrate the issue with my own experience. I had gone to a local parish for four years. I chose that parish because I viewed it as the most progressive, and it is.

However, during that whole time, I was not greeted by anyone other than my nephew. I don't see how we are carrying out the gospel message if we fail even to greet the stranger right in our midst.

The truth is that parishes become exclusive clubs rather than followers of "The Way."

This week, the local bishop has mandated that Eucharistic Ministers are no longer permitted to break the bread after it has been consecrated or to consume anything that is left over. This is just another example of the preference for control over relationship. It just extends the hierarchy even further, distinguishing those who are worthy from those who are not. We are all worthy by virtue of our baptism.

The following are the features of what a reformed church could look like:

- The church should focus on retaining the identity of community. Wherever one goes as a Catholic, they should find that the local parish has the recognizable features of this identity. They should immediately be welcomed.
- The emphasis should be on enriching people's lives with a spirituality that is life-giving and not guilt-ridden. Everyone should receive the message that they are beloved children of God and not spend their Sundays being told how much they are sinners.

Of course, sin is a reality but so is our dignity as a child of God, connected with the divine. The response isn't to beat people over the head with how they must be saved.

It is to celebrate the truth that it is already given to them. We support each other in our journey to truly follow the teaching of Yeshua.



Patrick Sullivan is ARCC Emeritus President. He comments: "Once people start to believe change is possible, the drive to achieve it accelerates." This reflection appeared in their Contemporary Catholic Belief and Action series.

The mission of ARCC is to bring about substantive structural change within the Catholic Church by seeking to institutionalize a collegial understanding of Church, where decision-making is shared and accountability is realized among Catholics of every kind and condition.

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- There should be much more bottom-up governance. People should never have to tolerate an autocratic priest or bishop. The community belongs to us all. This doesn't mean a direct democracy but a more equal sharing of responsibility for the church. Perhaps a shared governance structure where an elected body of the People of God (I don't much care for the term laity) that has the same force as those in the hierarchy (which should include priests, sisters, brothers, bishops, and deacons.) The people in the diocese, along with the council of priests, should select their own bishop.

- Ministerial roles should be determined entirely on a person's gifts (charisms) and not on sustaining the patriarchal structure. This may be accomplished by the communities identifying those in their midst who should receive the formation needed to serve in the ministries. This is completely consistent with Paul's teaching (1 Corinthians 12-14).

- Catechesis must go beyond the child-like to more adult theology. It must reflect people's lived experiences. This wholesome theology should empower all of us to recognize that we are called to carry out the charge of the gospel. Ideally, the education should enable people to grow spiritually and not remain completely dependent on the clergy.

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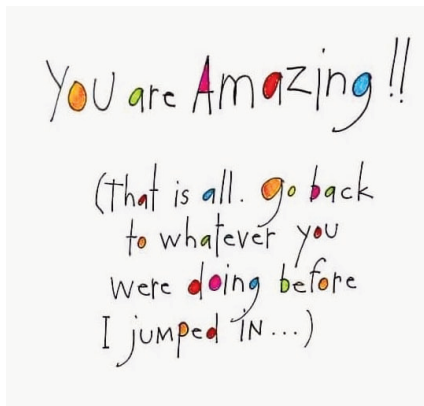
identifying those in their midst who should receive the formation needed to serve in the ministries. This is completely consistent with Paul's teaching (1 Corinthians 12-14).

- Liturgy is one of the great gifts of the church. It should remain rich and have some consistency in its basic form. However, it should also reflect the community itself. Rather than wasting so much time mandating very specific practices, the universal church should be stressing the importance of the elements. The local community should have considerable flexibility in how it is carried out. At the very least, the people should have a right to use their own language.

- Sacraments should be updated to reflect the lived experience of the people. They should not be archaic formulas that are foreign to people. Most importantly, they should be meaningful experiences not just "checking boxes."

Some may argue that some of these are the things that the Protestants do. Some are, it's true. So, perhaps in some of these ways they have been correct. I don't much care for some of the theology but many of their structural ideas make sense.

It is time that we stop separating ourselves from others and more time to bring forth the message that we are all responsible for bringing about the Reign of God and it is high time we got around to doing just that. It is not about control. It is about relationship.



"Jesus was not some nice, neatly-shaven white guy who carried a baby lamb in his arms, picking daisies, patting children on the head, and spouting off be-happy platitudes.

Jesus raised hell against the religious establishment, and his life was a middle-finger to those religious and political hierarchies and powers

that sought to dominate, control, oppress, exploit, shame and divide people.

Whether in the name of God or Caesar, Jesus would have none of it.

Each time Jesus opened his mouth, he was pulling out another wooden Jenga block that destabilized the power towers of his day.

Jesus' love was fierce, tenacious, courageous, unyielding, gutsy, and unflinching.

He stood for the inherent worth of every human being.

He denounced the religious lie that humankind was separated from God.

He told people to find heaven within themselves.

Jesus proclaimed another world was possible.

He chastised people for sitting around waiting on "God" to save the world, and told them to wake up and save it themselves. He rebuked people who tried to make a religion out of him, and argued that everyone is divine and human.

Jesus said the hope of the world is not some Gandalf-God sitting on a throne in the sky, but the power present in each of our hearts.

For all this, Jesus was victimized his entire life, and suffered a brutal execution.

Christians are fond of asking, "What would Jesus do?" I just don't think they can handle the real answer. Go ahead. Be my guest. Do what Jesus did."

Jim, Palmer, Inner Anarchy Get your copy -> <https://tinyurl.com/y8zaxcmr>

