Women's Equality in the Catholic Church, Clericalism and Structural Change

Submission to The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on Issues Paper II: Catholic Church Final Hearing

I am writing this submission as a wife, mother and grandmother who has been sustained by the gift of faith throughout my life. As former NSW Premier Kristina Keneally has said: ‘My faith is as central to my identity as my gender.’

I have worked for renewal in the Catholic Church over many years and I am married to a former Catholic priest, writer and Catholic commentator who has devoted his life to renewal in the Catholic Church. I currently represent Australia on the international network Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) and Co-ordinate the Australian Catholic Coalition of Church Renewal (ACCCR Attachment I), a network of renewal organisations who work independently and co-operatively on occasions for reform in the Catholic Church.

Church renewal is forefront in our personal and professional minds and lives, particularly as my three children all attended Catholic schools and Catholic University Colleges, and my husband and I now have six of our eight grandchildren in Catholic schools. We both work for structural reform in the governance of the Catholic Church. I work for the structural reform of women's equality in decision-making and in all forms of ordained ministry. Within this context, I also support and contribute to the issue of optional celibacy in the Catholic Church, all matters that are crucial to establishing the inclusive practice of Catholic faith for which millions of Catholics yearn.

This submission is about my experience of the power of ‘the clerical culture’ as a woman and advocate for women’s equality in the Catholic Church. It recommends some first steps in this crucial structural reform that are possible at this time to start to change the clerical culture that Pope Francis identifies as so destructive in his Apostolic Exhortations The joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Guadium) and The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia).

People the world over are shocked by the Church’s abuse, shocked because the perpetrators seemed so blind to the fact that what they were doing was abuse, shocked because many of those responsible in Catholicism covered up the abuse. When they did become aware of it, many didn’t apply the Christian principles of justice and love, and did not recognize their duty of care to the most vulnerable. They moved to protect the reputation of the institution and its finances, rather than protect and care for society’s most vulnerable members.
Stunned at first, people were then completely disillusioned. Think of the recent film Spotlight in which the young investigative journalist who had let his faith lapse, said sadly 'I had always thought I would go back to it.' This is the case for millions. The behavior of the institutional Catholic Church has broken the trust of the people and lost credibility with the world. I believe that 'the clerical culture' that has developed is a key factor in the abuse and also in paralyzing theological development in the Church hierarchy. Discussing Cardinal John Henry Newman’s theology of development Paul Collins says, ‘Genuine Catholicism is dynamic, constantly responding to its circumstances, open to the world, the very antithesis of sectarian’ (Believers (2008), p 162).

For most of the older generation, Catholic or otherwise, it is unbelievable that institutional Catholicism could support such behaviour. This is a Church which has historically influenced the spread of the Christian message universally and which has provided the foundation for western democracy and culture (inspirational music, art, architecture, scholarship, social justice) and that even now has the power to influence and reconcile divided people and warring factions and intercede for good in the world.

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‘Culture’ is described across dictionaries as ‘the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is transmitted from generation to generation.’ Clericalism is described as upholding the power of the clergy in politics. Institutional culture develops guided by its mission and the structures it establishes to achieve this. In very simple terms the mission of the Catholic Church is to bring Christ’s gospel message of justice and love to the world.

However, over the centuries ‘the ways of living’ in the Catholic culture isolates its priests from real women as opposed to an ideological spiritual understanding of woman, and this contributes to discrimination against women and has produced an institutional Catholic Church in which I believe women are feared to some extent. It is seen by some as a monolithic bureaucracy that has lost sight of the gospel message of equality. Spanish Benedictine Sister Teresa Forcades (medical doctor, with a Phd. in Public Health) says ‘the church is an institution in which patriarchy is rampant. All the decision-making is linked to something called ‘ordination’ and ordination is linked to something called gender.’

What sort of structures and formation have developed to generate this ‘clerical culture’ that unintentionally blinded so many to cease developing and to not take responsibility? Historically, the structure, forms and meanings of ministry and ordination have changed over the centuries. For example ordination as we know it now was only formalized in the 11th century. So from Christ’s time till then, men and women (such as deaconesses and abbesses) took responsibility for ministry according to their charisms and gifts within their faith community, while still closely linked with other faith communities.

After the 11th century women were intentionally excluded from responsibility in Church decision-making. An all-male, exclusive ministry developed that demanded that the Eucharist which was central to Catholic practice, could only
be celebrated by celibate males. This doctrine is what the Church and Pope Francis in recent exhortations describe as the doctrine of persona Christi, that is acting ‘as Christ’. This doctrine teaches that a priest at ordination takes on the likeness of Christ and therefore has to be male and cannot be a woman. Thus women are banned from ordination on the basis of gender. This doctrine was well established by the 16th century. From then onwards the persona Christi doctrine functioned to separate the priesthood from the laity in the Church making the priesthood an exclusive cast which is inconsistent with the gospel message. As St. Paul says in the Letter to the Galatians: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all equal in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28).

The church’s governance structure of today finally evolved in the 17th century. The persona Christi doctrine of priesthood has functioned to maintain the all-male hierarchical structure that has continued since then despite the wide ranging social changes that have occurred over 400 years and the second Vatican Council.

Thankfully many have done more than their share to counter this culture; think of Bishops Bill Morris, Pat Power, Geoffrey Robinson, or priests like Fathers Frank Brennan, Eric Hodgens, Greg Reynolds, Peter Maher, Edmund Campion, Ian McGinity, Jim Littleton and former priests and laity like Paul Collins, Frank Purcell, Kevin Walcott, Peter Wilkinson, David Timbs, John May, John Hill and Michael Morwood, Vin Hindmarsh, Terry Curtin and Brian McKitrick. Among the women are Sisters Joan Chittister, Elizabeth Johnston, Jeanine Gramick, Mary Shanahan, Cecilia Merrigan, Betty McMahon, Veronica Littleton and women like Marie Louise Uhr, Ann Nugent, Kristina Keneally, Bernice Moore, Anne O’Brien, Mary McAleese and Mary Robinson. There are thousands more priests, religious and laypeople who work dedicatedly in parishes and health, welfare and education.

I believe that both the ‘structural issues’ of compulsory male celibacy and inequality for women in decision-making and in all forms of ordained ministry have undoubtedly contributed to the clerical culture that has developed in our Church. There is a dysfunctional gender imbalance in our church and it damages so many and stifles theological development. Marie Keenan in her book Child Sexual Abuse & the Catholic Church Gender, Power and Organizational Culture discusses these issues.

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Reflecting on my own experience and that of many other Catholics, I would say that even as a young child the power of this culture encapsulated you. You learned it from people you loved and respected, you understood the world and all your actions through the lens of Catholic culture and you got the sense of a God of love and a culture of care. This was reinforced by accompanying your parents in Catholic action work like visiting new migrants, saving your pocket money for those less fortunate or in developing countries, listening to your parents stories (carefully edited) of St Vinnie’s visits around the dinner table. You felt you belonged; you could trust anything Catholic.
This was how it was for me. I knew I was blessed. My parents and grandparents were questioning people whose consciences were well developed and utilized and who were able to mediate any inappropriate sanctification of the Church, or the thunder and lightning of missionary sermons that put the fear of damnation into you. They had a robust sense of humor while calling us to account on any of our behavior they classified as 'not Christian'. Other Catholic households were more doctrinaire, where the God presented was predominantly of fear. In these families people were more unlikely to challenge the status quo.

My point about formation here is that Catholicism was your world, so if it went wrong, as it did for so many, you had nowhere to go. Church authority was all powerful and imbued fear. Some parents even unknowingly colluded in the child abuse.

As one became an adult there were many Catholic sodalities, associations and university clubs that supported your faith. So as a young woman I was involved in these and fairly well protected. It wasn't until I was contemplating marriage and as young wife and mother in my twenties when contraception issues arose with health and financial concerns that I started to question Church teachings. The same applied to thousands of others like me and millions more who were financially worse off and didn't have the supportive husband I had.

Even at that stage, it was monumental to make decisions against Church teachings. It led to sleepless nights, relationship tensions, and intrusion in the intimacy of marriage. You lived with complete dissonance. As a Catholic you have an enormous loyalty to the Church that formed you. You had to learn to separate your faith in a loving God from the institutional Church and rely on your conscience to guide you. A weekly or daily liturgy and restoring Eucharist is grounding and comforting to people of faith and one feared denial of this.

For those aspiring to religious life seminaries and novitiates provided formation for young men and women to enter the priesthood and religious life. They sometimes began training at 13 or 14. Their formation was quite Spartan if not cruel in some cases, by to-day's standards, removed from family life and the world. Nevertheless many praise the education they received from dedicated teachers.

Their relationship to God was central while other relationships and intimacy were not encouraged. Again this all-encompassing culture encouraged parents to condone and even desire this arrangement. There was considerable social status associated with having a child in the priesthood or a religious order.

Young seminarians did not experience normal adolescence. In the seminary when their intellectual and theological development started to fire, I question what was happening to their emotional intelligence and sexual development which was seemingly put on hold.
An immature sexuality is another factor that contributes to the clerical culture today. Even Pope Francis who I and many believe is the most pastoral and prophetic Pope of our lifetime, is not aware of the extent to which he himself is affected by this clerical culture and that his understanding of women is a blind spot for him. This is evidenced in the way he speaks about women and what he sometimes says. (For example the transcript of his recent address in Rome to the 900 Heads of Women’s Religious orders who would be highly experienced women who have born the heat of the day and who were extremely polite.) I understand that this is cultural and completely unintentional, nevertheless difficult.

I have great respect for all those young conscientious men and women religious and priests who were committed and dedicated to learning how to serve God’s people. These young men and women gave up their youth, marriage, family, and normal sexual expression to serve others. They lived and worked in exceptional conditions to hone their considerable skills to bring Christ’s message of love and justice to the world. They applied themselves to intellectual accomplishments that would have exceeded their worldly peers in many cases. Many gained professional qualifications while at the same time serving the people. Others worked in different cultures learning complex languages. Let’s not forget that so many parts of our world are the better for their efforts.

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The Second Vatican Council II (1962-1965) swept through the Church and priests, religious and laity were inspired with new possibilities. Vatican II called for the Church to eliminate discrimination against ‘the other’ as contrary to God’s intent, and had a vision that called for the fundamental rights of the person. In the pews people were taking notice of Church governance issues in a way they hadn’t before. Here was a blueprint for the Church of the future and generations to come.

Personally, as my children grew older I became more involved with church renewal in groups like Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) Equipes Notre Dame (Teams of Our Lady) and others.

Sadly for priests and people alike the enormous potential of Vatican II was not realized. Popes and bishops like John Paul II, Benedict XVI instituted a ‘reform of the reform’ and Church culture seemed to become more authoritarian and clericalised and the energy of Vatican II started to slip away. What I started to see was how intrusive key teachings of the church were on family life. I hastened to say that this was also influenced by my own development, further responsibility as a parent, professional responsibility in social policy and further tertiary study. Vatican II with its messages of recognizing the signs of the times had given us hope.

Those of us working in reform/renewal movements now started to think that we needed to act; our church was ceasing to serve its people. The child abuse crisis was beginning to surface in the US, particularly with the Gilbert Gauthie case in Louisiana, first exposed by the journalist Jason Berry.
Vatican II had stimulated us to question what was happening to our church culture. We started to ask deeper questions about why considerable numbers of priests and bishops and some sisters failed to recognize that what was occurring was a grave offence to the vulnerable in their care and against the gospel and didn't act to stop it.

Why did this happen? The answer is multifaceted.
- the priesthood within the Catholic community as late as the 1970s and 1980s had high status, and was held in great esteem by the community and was never questioned;
- in some cases priesthood was a vehicle to shift social status and obtain an education that would otherwise have not been possible;
- children were not nurtured and protected in the way they are now across society;
- words to express sexual acts were not sanctioned even in society generally, until after the sexual revolution and the AIDS epidemic; that is we didn't have the words to say it;
- the status of women in society was very different and they had much less influence;
- as time progressed far greater numbers in society were educated to the same extent as the priests and religious women;
- religious women's orders tried to act in responsible ways and were hauled to account by the Vatican.

It is hard not to imagine that if there had been parents, (mothers and fathers) in the decision making processes of the Church, that they would have recognized the child abuse and would have acted to stop it immediately.

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On 22 May 1994 the Apostolic Letter Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (Priestly Ordination) was issued by Pope John Paul II. In it he stated that 'the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women', and that ordination was reserved 'to men alone.' He also decreed that the issue of women's ordination was not to be discussed on church premises.

I was working at this stage for Ordination for Catholic Women which was fondered by Marie Louise Uhr to advocate for the ordination of women into a 'renewed ordained ministry' so this group particularly recognized 'the clericalism'. We tried to enter into discussion with the Australian Bishops writing to each of the bishops. Initially I think we received 3 responses from about 43 bishops. However, we persisted over a number of years and responses increased and became more than one liners that said there was nothing they could do. At least half expressed compassion for our cause, one in particular sent a cheque for a hundred dollars.

As years and Popes progressed and we continued to work on conferences, demonstrations and mediating Vatican announcements with informative press releases to influence change and build relationships, the situation for women's
ordination deteriorated and our groups started to mainstream the idea of inclusive ministry across reform groups. Over this same period we were forming relationships with large international groups who added credibility to our cause and were willing to share intellectual material and support us. These were groups like the International Movement We are Church (IMWAC) Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW), Future Church, and the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research. We now have extensive reform networks internationally who work collectively to support each other.

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The election of Pope Francis hailed a new era. The announcement of the Synods in 2014 and 2015 gave us hope. The reform groups collectively offered to help the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference with the consultations that Pope Francis desired. We were dismissed with a one-liner saying ‘No thank you. We’ll handle it’. We weren’t just being marginalized. It was like we didn’t exist and our work had no relevance.

The institutional Church was using ‘silence’ as a power to divide and dismiss intentionally or otherwise. This ‘silence’ is another key factor in the culture of clericalism. It is used to control everyone, including bishops and priests who are dependent on their position to survive and it also imbues our leadership with fear.

Sr. Teresa Forcades (Benedictine nun from Catalan), in her excellent paper to the recent WOW Conference, Gender, Gospel and Global Justice, Philadelphia 2016 referring to the power of silence:

‘Denying space/voice means ignoring the consistent otherness of the other; it means pretending that differences are only at the superficial level, that they are only an appearance, but if you are able to transcend difference and appearance in order to have a deeper vision, what you will find is unity. Many philosophies have espoused this view, according to which the core of reality is uniform, it doesn’t have a place for consistent difference/otherness.’ She goes on to say ‘Denying space/voice amounts to colonialism, imperialism, tyranny; it is denying the differentiated identity of the other: if you cannot convert, kill... It is the sin of modernism.’ Walter Breuggemann is another theologian who further expands on the power and destructiveness of ‘institutional silence’.

Many of our committed Catholic priests tried to intercede but they too weren’t heard or were punished. Bishop Pat Power three times wrote to the Vatican on the issue of compulsory celibacy and did not get a response.

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At the time of the Synods we decided to send correspondence to bishops with copies to the Papal Nuncio who was Archbishop Paul Gallagher. We also wrote individually and collectively to Rome by registered mail with copies sent via the Nuncio. We were hoping to get our correspondence to Pope Francis but that didn’t seem to happen. We did get answers from one or two of the Cardinals. They were polite and gracious one liners that did not address the issues, with a
prayer attached. One of our Coalition members Dr. Trish Hindmarsh of WATA was successful and received a very understanding letter from Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi.

We developed a dialogue in 2014 and 2015 with Bishop Eugene Hurley and Archbishop Mark Coleridge (bishops elected by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference as Australia’s representatives to the Synod). As the Synod was about marriage and family life the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal (ACCCR) had arranged and submitted eight people as representative families, all of whom were committed Catholics with a track record in pastoral work, including Kristina Keneally and LGBTI person. CV’s for each were attached to correspondence.

We had a real battle to establish face to face discussion with Bishops Hurley and Coleridge, even though we travelled to Darwin and Melbourne to meet them. We did eventually establish some polite and thoughtful correspondence with these bishops but they were reluctant to engage in authentic conversation and didn’t acknowledge our nominations. Other than to say members of the laity would not be attending. Those nominated were willing to put their lives on hold and somehow get to Rome. The representative who did accompany the bishops was Dr. Maria Harries a woman who does fine work, but the bishops never at any stage let us know about this; we simply read about it in the papers, it was disrespectful to us and to people’s efforts.

Despite Cardinal George Pell’s avowal of the fact that the Church does not need structural change (emphasized in his testimony to the Royal Commission in Rome), the vast majority of mainstream theologians commenting on this issue disagree with him. I can’t help but think nothing short of structural and cultural change will impact on this terrible dysfunction of our Church. If we want to pass on the faith to future generations we have to look to developing the Church of the future. What sort of Church will serve the people after the horror of the childdabuse and after the Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse. We need to address structural change as a matter of urgency.

The Church governance structures identified in this submission that would immediately impact on ‘the clerical culture’ are optional celibacy and equality for women in the Church. Pope Francis has identified equality for women as a matter of urgency. Unfortunately when Pope Francis canvassed the issue of compulsory celibacy a few months ago some bishops’ conferences (e.g. the English Bishops conference) denied that this was an issue. Authentic discussion with our bishops is the real barrier to progress at present. I don’t think it is intentional; maybe it is a by-product of being in an authoritarian culture of fear that actually has robbed them of their ability to lead.

Pope Francis has tried to free them and direct them in his exhortations and his year of mercy, but they are immobilized by their culture. Their answer to reform is to reconstruct the church of the past. The Former President of Ireland and Catholic Theologian Mary McAleese says ‘We have to assist our bishops and priests to unlearn and self-critique.’
Bernice Moore WATAW says ‘we have to be the change we want to see’ to transform the Church. At the moment the renewal movement could certainly lead on the issue of women’s equality in decision-making as a first step in opening the door to all forms of ordained ministry.

Peter Johnstone a colleague who heads up Catholics for Renewal a Melbourne based reform group recently said: ‘Let’s keep it simple. Men and women are made in the image of God. There is no argument that can justify banning women from certain roles in the Church. In fact we need gender balance to ensure informed decision making, a desperate need in light of the current limited thinking of the aged celibate males who take all the decisions. Let’s be very clear that the ban on the ordination of women is presently used to exclude women from senior decision-making jobs by prescribing the priesthood as a necessary qualification. Let’s start with 50% of the heads of curial dicasteries being filled by some of the many top progressive women theologians. Francis could do this.’

We have to act to stop this destructive patriarchy. Focusing on moving women into decision-making positions through the Church would start to change the clerical culture, would also work to break the ‘silence’ and would augur well for optional celibacy.’

We need to build a platform to pursue women’s equality in the Catholic Church in Australia under the umbrella of Church Governance based on our Christian theology that states we are all equal in God’s likeness. We propose the following as first priorities for structural change:

1. develop and implement the strategy of moving women into decision-making positions in curial dicasteries that do not require ordination (canvassed by the Cardinal Parolin, Secretary of State, recently) and similarly move women into governance structures in dioceses in Australia and across the world.

2. work to have *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* revoked. (supported by one of the German bishop recently)

3. Most women say there have been enough Commissions on Women’s place in the Church. There is no barrier just sinful sexism. Ordain women who are qualified and have a vocation. But if the Vatican does proceeds with the Commission on Women Deacons, at least half its members must be competent women and all members must be competent and independent of the Vatican.

ACCCR Renewal groups would continue to work on our individual governance issues while maintaining our international connections and collaborative work on co-operative projects such as trying to influence the Holy See’s appalling stance (Attachment II recent report) on women’s reproductive health and sexuality in the United Nations.
I am hopeful that the Royal Commission on Sexual Abuse has the ability to make recommendations that address structural change that will impact on the clerical culture of the Church. I believe the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal’s individual groups would support the priorities identified here as recommendations from the Royal Commission on Child Sexual Abuse.

Ideally the Church could fund the renewal movement through a grant preferably placed in an independent institution such as the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACCC) with its ties to Charles Sturt University. Perhaps some overall grant for Renewal of Church Governance structures with half the funding allocated to establish a Foundation for Women’s Equality across faiths based in Australia. The ACCCR would consider such change essential if the Royal Commission is to have any confidence in the Church’s response to the Commission’s report. Australia has an Ambassador-designate to the Holy See who is a woman, mother and career diplomat who takes up her appointment shortly.

Can you imagine how ‘the status of women’ would start to change across the world if the Catholic Church with all its influence granted full equality to women?

Women’s full equality is crucial to Pope Francis’ stated aim to create peace, reduce violence and poverty in the world; and to rid the Church of the clerical culture that he recognizes as destructive. Many would say that the Catholic Church is irresponsible not to lead on this crucial issue.

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**Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal  Attachment I**

**The ACCCR Call**

*Jesus inspired his disciples to form a community to proclaim and live the Good News of love, justice, equality, self-giving and hope. The institutional Church has failed to listen to its people thus alienating many through an emphasis on power, hierarchy and discrimination, with a lack of transparency and accountability. Australian Catholics have a responsibility to act now in ways that reflect the values of the Gospel, the vision of Vatican II and the best values of Australian society. Our Call as disciples is to be:*

A Catholic Church that reflects Jesus’ message of love, justice, equality, peace and forgiveness.

A Catholic Church in which all people are directed by their conscience and assume their responsibility for the mission of the Church.
A Catholic Church which inspires its people to recapture an experience of the mystical and the spiritual.

A Catholic Church where God-given authority is used wisely and justly to propagate the teachings of Christ, and respects the role of the People of God.

A Catholic Church where all people, men and women, single and married minister in a spirit of co-responsibility for the Church.

A Catholic Church that influences Australian society to be ever more just, compassionate and egalitarian.

The Coalition as of 1 January 2016 includes:
*Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) [www.watac.net](http://www.watac.net)*
*Catholics for Renewal (CathR) [www.catholicsforrenewal.org](http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org)*
*Inclusive Catholics (IC) [www.inclusive-catholics.com](http://www.inclusive-catholics.com)*
*The Friendship Group (Bunbury, WA)*
*Aggiormaneto (Perth, WA)*
*Australian Reforming Catholics (ARC) [www.e-arc.org](http://www.e-arc.org)*

Each of the groups has its own focus and history, but all are united in the call for renewal in the Church. The Coalition is open to other groups who share this vision and identify with the call for Church renewal.

ACCCR's role is to foster collaboration and support between the groups and to disseminate messages of hope and opportunity and, on occasion, to bring voices of like mind together to impact on a common purpose. It also has a key role to lobby for crucial structural change for the type of renewal in the Australian Catholic Church that is envisioned in this Coalition Call Statement.

ACCCR does not initiate specific projects, rather it supports and adds value to projects initiated by its partner groups. Nor does it have individual members; if you wish to be more involved in our work we invite you to become a member of one of our coalition groups.

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**The Holy See/UN**

**Extract of article by Miriam Duignan** Wijngaards Institute's latest Newsletter 2016.

A stark reminder of the consequences of religious resistance to women's empowerment came when I attended a panel hosted by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See at the United Nations.

The topic was maternal mortality in Africa but the obvious purpose of the event was to reinforce the Vatican's objection to any form of birth control. At every major conference on women's equality, the Holy See challenges policy proposals that contain the terms 'sexual and reproductive health', 'reproductive rights', and 'family planning'. As the world's largest non-governmental provider of
healthcare, this translates to millions of women being denied access to contraception by Catholic run medical facilities.

The panel, chaired by Archbishop Bernardito Auza, laid blame for the high rates of women dying in childbirth in Africa on the lack of maternity units alone, denying claims by medical experts that an essential component of modern healthcare includes birth control. The Archbishop also made an appeal for acceptance of women’s unique and essential role as mothers and portrayed attempts to limit birthrates as a capitalist agenda that sees ‘motherhood as an economically disadvantaged model of life’.

The speakers claimed that an ‘international lobby’ is imposing ‘a new colonialism’ on Africa by pushing for access to contraceptives. There was no clear differentiation made between the responsible use of modern contraceptives and what they called a ‘culture of death’ whereby any desire to limit family size is portrayed as unconditional condoning of abortion. The panelists refused to consider that making contraception available would reduce the number of desperate women seeking unsafe and illegal abortions that contribute to the tragic rates of maternal mortality.

There were audible gasps in the conference hall as Dr. Robert Walley, the founder of MaterCare International, appealed for funding to increase maternity units in Africa whilst showing images of teenage mothers living in abject poverty in overcrowded conditions and in clearly polygamous marriages. He casually referred to the fact that the mothers are illiterate and uneducated, but that the charity had invested in creating cartoon drawings of how to have successful pregnancies to ‘help’ them.

NB. Professor Hilary Charlesworth, Professor of International Law and Human Rights College of Law ANU, now based at Law Faculty, Melbourne University, has explored these issues.