As an intentional result of political correctness, third-wave feminism and intersectional theory, collectively known as Cultural Marxism, the West is being habituated to an unstable social experiment. While some of us see the experiment as a slippery slope, signalling the end of the West, others say the idea of a slippery slope is fallacious. They see no causal connection between accepting X and the inevitability of Y, since they won’t admit a correlation between X and Y. According to this logic, for example, the widespread adoption of contraception, which allowed women reproductive autonomy, didn’t inevitably lead to the normalisation of, or create marketing opportunities for, pornography and everything once regarded as sexual perversion. Even if this logic is true in theory, it’s nonsense in practice. Slippery slopes do exist. How else to explain the exponentially increasing prevalence of anal sex among heterosexual millennials and gen-Xers? First came the bikini, and then came Brazilian waxing, and now we have anal bleaching. What’s next?

The same can be said of modern medicine, with all its blessings and curses. Obviously, with the discovery of antibiotics and antivirals, sexually transmitted infections are treatable. As a result, the nexus between sexual behaviour and personal responsibility for that behaviour has been broken forever. Promiscuity is big business. It creates jobs and market demand. The medical profession needs it and thrives on it.

In this context, are we still able to speak of the West having a moral framework, now that everything has been normalised—or is on its way to being normalised—and issues once regarded as moral are packaged and marketed as rights? In other words, what’s left in the morals basket once everything gets transferred to the rights basket and no one is allowed to talk about morals (or personal responsibility) any more? I speak as an individual who happens to be a priest.

For me, conversations about traditional moral issues are increasingly rare—and increasingly difficult—with Christians and non-Christians alike. This isn’t because I have nothing to say about traditional moral issues. It’s because those who broach a moral subject with me, on the rare occasions they do, tend to second-guess what I believe and therefore what I’m going to say. Invariably, they finish my sentences for me, but they never say what I was going to say had I been given the chance to finish my sentences myself. Conversations always end there, politely yet frustratingly. I’m not one to argue, don’t struggle to be heard, and would make an ineffective missionary.

Because I represent the Church, there’s a widespread assumption that anything I might believe, or might say, won’t validate the confirmation bias of my hearers. If there are many logical fallacies behind this assumption—about what I believe and might say—it is what it is. Because I’m not God, I’m only responsible for my cognitive dissonance, not yours, and not everyone else’s. Jesus bore that weight for me. There’s one thing for sure in my mind, however. When the scribes and the Pharisees brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, and asked him whether she should be stoned according to the law, he said the first stone should be cast by the one without sin. When they were shamed into leaving, he turned to her and said: “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you? I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more” (John 8:1–11).

While this passage tends to be widely invoked, out of context, to place Jesus on the side of those who believe the Law doesn’t apply to them—those who believe they are justified by faith—notice that Jesus told her to stop sinning. He didn’t say sin no longer exists, or adultery is okay, or the Law no longer matters. There’s no biblical support for antinomianism. Jesus was clear about his relationship with the Torah: “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). Also, there was no mention of her
rights. He didn’t tell her to become a social justice warrior. He didn’t say black lives matter. He was neither a Cultural Marxist nor a member of the Frankfurt School. If the power of this story no longer resonates, it’s because we now live in a highly relativised civilisation that refuses to distinguish between Jesus Christ and Ellen Degeneres. We’ve lost our belief in God as Creator and therefore our belief in the two inseparable, interdependent covenants upon which Western civilisation is based: the one from Sinai, the other from Christ.

We’re often told that most Australians believe in God—as some all-purpose, relativised, personalised construct—have some kind of personal spirituality, and even some kind of personal morality, which they exercise outside the Church or any form of institutional religion. Where does this quaint yet naive personal belief come from? In aesthetics, we see it forcefully in William Blake, the Romantic poet, who offered the theory of solitary poetic genius—the poet with extraordinary gifts of perception—unmediated by institutional, hierarchical, clericalised religion. This idea of the poet-seer is central to Romanticism’s image of the artist as inspired, troubled, isolated, possessed, and even prophetic; however, it’s particularly vulnerable, as far as ideas go, and cannot be pushed too far without collapsing under the reality that everything we know is mediated in some way. If the degree to which we are born blank slates (tabulae rasae) is contested, the debate between nature and nurture continues. No one is born with an innate knowledge of their social context, or cultural inheritance, let alone universal principles. Each individual needs to be taught. For proof of this truism, watch parents bringing up children. The idea that knowledge is unmediated—by organised society, or by formal education, or by institutional religion—has always struck me as absurd.

In a liberal democracy, the separation of Church and state is essential; however, even when it’s free of political constraint and interference, the Church is still vulnerable whenever its mission opposes the world. Everyone knows religion is a powerful tool, which is why many want the Church to become their tool, or prevent it from becoming someone else’s tool, or destroy it altogether. The medieval popes understood this, which is why they had their hands full keeping the emperors at bay.

Ever since the Church began it’s been attacked for witnessing to its beliefs, and for standing between its enemies and their utopias, which always become dystopias. Over the centuries, its enemies—who are legion—have been responsible for many large-scale persecutions of the Church. Even if we limit ourselves to the modern period, since the so-called Enlightenment, there have been many attempts to de-Christianise Europe and its colonies, and there have been many genocides of Christian populations in non-Christian nations. Even now, in the twenty-first century, hundreds of Christians are killed for their faith each day, and many more are tortured, while Australians are forced to focus on same-sex marriage, the normalisation of mental illness, and the manufactured identity crises of the worried well.

What will the future of Christianity look like? Will the Church bow to all the Cultural Marxist pressure? Regardless of whether it does, or it doesn’t, the Church will look different in the future. The most likely scenario, as I see it, is a return to some form of pre-Constantinian Christianity. While this term means different things to different people, it’s obvious the Church is gradually returning to—or is being forced to return to—its origins: to the period before it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. In all probability, in the not too distant future, the Church will once again become a Christian witness in a pagan world, with no special status, increasingly excluded from the public forum, or the marketplace of ideas, and increasingly persecuted for being what it is called to be. Many Christians will embrace this future as an opportunity. Many will experience it as a threat. The threatened will either leave or adapt. Every Christian will be forced to grapple with one central fact: there are limits to how much the Church can accommodate the world without abandoning Christ.

Even before Cultural Marxism became hegemonic in the West, a popular narrative existed about how good things were in the pagan world and how bad things became when Judaism and Christianity appeared on the world stage with their party-pooping moral codes. According to this narrative, which blames the revelation on Sinai and the revelation in Christ for everything wrong with the world, ancient Greece gave us democracy, and was a nirvana for same-sex couples, especially if they were male. The truth is quite different. As far as democracy is concerned, the West owes more to ancient Israel than it does to ancient Greece, and this applies to the Torah as much as to the Gospels. As far as same-sex relationships are concerned, the
erastes–eromenos relationship—or pederasty in ancient Greece—was circumscribed by strict moral conventions, was scripted and formulaic, did not involve same-sex marriage, and bore no resemblance to homosexual relationships today. In other words, if you believe the popular narrative, about democracy and homosexuality in ancient Greece, you’ll believe anything that validates your confirmation bias, and you’ll reject anything that doesn’t.

It’s often said that the major crisis facing Western civilisation is the loss or abandonment of the Judeo-Christian principles on which it is based. This is true, of course; however, in my experience, those who say this don’t go to, and would never think of going to, synagogue on Saturday or church on Sunday. Further, they never tell us what those principles are. The few who attempt to do so usually trot out a form of Stoicism, or a philosophy of the virtues, or a formula for leading an examined life or being a good citizen of the polis. What’s missing from these pagan explanations is any sense of divine–human covenant, or any existential encounter with the God who spoke to humanity on Sinai and through Christ. The real crisis facing Western civilisation is its inability to articulate what its Judeo-Christian principles are. Most Westerners have either forgotten them, or never learned them, or simply don’t care about them. Let’s be honest about this.

Here I offer a few personal opinions about the present and a few personal thoughts about the future of Christianity.

Fundamentalism and liberalism

We are conditioned to view fundamentalism in pejorative terms, as a form of stupidity. In a purely Christian context, if you ask what fundamentalism is, you’ll be told it’s biblical literalism as an irrational form of anti-science: for example, believing the world was created in six twenty-four-hour days. But if you were then to ask how long a day is, in God’s time, you will get suspicious looks, since this is a trick question (Psalm 90:4). If you point out that creation science is not an oxymoron, because the idea that God created the world is compatible with big-bang theory, natural selection, evolutionary theory and the scientific method, and because Darwin believed in God, you’ll be dismissed as nuts.

In fact, the term fundamentalism has nothing to do with biblical literalism. It was originally coined, as a reaction against modernism, to describe five fundamental theological beliefs that needed to be defended against liberal theology and what academics call higher criticism. These are: divine inspiration (scriptural infallibility), the virgin birth, the belief in Jesus’s death as the atonement for sin, Jesus’s bodily resurrection, and the historical reality of Jesus’s miracles. Therefore, what most people regard as Christian fundamentalism is, properly understood, the belief system of mainstream Christians. Pejorative references to the Bible Belt are therefore shocking, particularly when they are made by liberal Christians trying to score cheap points against conservative Christians. (I’m not like them. Don’t confuse me with them.)

Liberal Christians, many of whom prefer distinguishing themselves from conservative Christians instead of living a biblical faith, should focus more on the non-negotiable aspects of Christian belief instead of finding fault with what conservatives believe. If any liberal Christian is comfortable reciting the creeds in church, but is uncomfortable defending those same creeds outside church, they have a lot of soul-searching to do and may be happier joining a Rotary or Lions Club. Although I operate within what is widely understood to be the liberal branch of the Church, I’m not a liberal. This simply means that—far-fetched as they are—I accept the five fundamentals, the Creeds (Nicene, Apostles’, Athanasian), and the ecumenical councils of the undivided church. In this sense, I am a fundamentalist.

Jewish and Christian scripture is cultural memory, not automatic writing, redacted over many centuries. Its meaning—its infallible truth—was codified by an often controversial and rancorous collective discernment. This collective discernment occurs wholly within the Church, as part of its spirit-driven teaching authority. The problem facing the Church is coming to an agreement, through collective discernment, on how divine inspiration manifests itself in scripture, and becomes infallible, once the idea of scripture-as-automatic-writing is put aside. We must reconcile the idea of divine inspiration, including the idea of scriptural infallibility, with the idea of scripture as cultural memory.

Christian disloyalty hurts the Church, whatever its cause, wherever it comes from. However, liberal disloyalty bothers me more than conservative disloyalty, because it’s insidious, and because it doesn’t admit to (and actively denies) being prejudice. To liberals, only conservatives have prejudices. Because liberals define themselves as broad-minded, and therefore right, anyone they disagree with is defined as narrow-minded, and therefore wrong. Christian disloyalty towards other Christians has always been the biggest problem facing the Church. Christianity’s disloyalty towards Judaism has always been the biggest problem facing the world. However, in my limited experience, the only experience I have, disloyalty is mainly a liberal phenomenon, in the present historical moment.
In the West, Church politics often mirrors secular politics. In Australia, the governing structures of the Anglican Church mirror the constitutional structures of the Australian Federation, which means the Anglican Church in Australia has an identifiably Westminster feel about it. In North America, the governing structures of The Episcopal Church (TEC) mirror the constitutional structures of the US Federation, which is quite different. Like the congressional system, TEC doesn’t have a Westminster feel about it. It’s more vulnerable to populism, its clergy are beholden to its laity, and its House of Bishops is unable to safeguard the faith. From the beginning, the first Bishop of Connecticut, Samuel Seabury, realised the potential for Enlightenment philosophy to ultimately separate TEC from the larger body of Anglican Christianity, which of course is finally happening.

Through its use of executive power, in prosecuting a progressive agenda, the Obama administration represented a particularly dark period in Western civilisation. There are parallels with TEC under Presiding Bishops Katharine Jefferts Schori (2006–2015) and Michael Curry (2015–present). Under Jefferts Schori, TEC was responsible for the deprivation of due process, and the denial of natural justice, when inhibiting and deposing hundreds of bishops, priests and deacons for the crime of dissenting from TEC’s aggressive promotion of gender inclusiveness and LGBT rights. Dioceses and congregations that sought to leave TEC, and join or form more traditional Churches, have been stripped of their property, and the ongoing fight over property has been scandalous. It has been widely noted that, as an authoritarian liberal, Jefferts Schori presided over the largest exercise of penal discipline in the history of any Church in the Anglican Communion and her actions have been widely construed as malicious. Under Curry, whom an Episcopal priest-friend in the US refers to as a buffoon—a waiter in a southern seafood restaurant, white towel draped over his arm, trying to ensure that everyone has a place at the table—we see what happens when a progressive agenda takes hold, becomes irreversible, and does bad things to good people, all for the sake of political correctness.

Through its actions, TEC now seems more like the Democratic Party than the Body of Christ and it has done serious harm to global Anglican unity. In typical US fashion, TEC has construed its vision for the good of the national Church as synonymous with the good of the universal Church. In fact, this is an example of cultural arrogance and, paradoxically, is a form of post-colonial imperialism. As Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie outlined the underlying problem in his September 1985 address at the opening service of TEC’s triennial General Convention:

The gospel is often most powerfully preached when it is related to a people’s search for identity, justice and freedom. Such local expressions of the Church, however, can be limited in sympathy and partial in understanding. The Church is unavoidably conformed to the culture in which it is set and to which it must preach, and it is all too easy to identify the spirit of the age with the spirit of God … the Christian Church exists in many different cultures, and the gospel is proclaimed with the aid of many different philosophies, but it is not to be identified with any of them … History has set the see of Canterbury at the centre of our Anglican unity, but its role is to gather the family not to rule it. The power to decide matters of faith, order and morals remains with the local church. This could so easily be a recipe for incoherence and for that ecclesiastical isolationism which pays scant regard to the convictions of others. Much therefore depends on what I can only describe as “a sense of Catholic solidarity” … In the end, we belong to the whole Catholic Church of God which has a breadth and an enduring strength greater than that of any individual or particular church. It is this “sense of solidarity” which has allowed the Church through the ages to deal with great questions in order to get on with its chief task of witness, mission and service.

If Runcie’s observations are viewed in terms of present realities, TEC has clearly lost its “sense of Catholic solidarity”, thrown its weight behind a local or culturally-specific church, “limited in sympathy and partial in understanding”, which identifies “the spirit of the age with the spirit of God”. Worse than that, TEC identifies the universal Church with American exceptionalism, and the kind of Cultural Marxism over which the 2016 presidential election was fought. The only difference is that, in this case, TEC has backed itself into a corner and given itself little room to manoeuvre. Reclaiming “a sense of Catholic solidarity” will be hard but isn’t impossible.

At its 2015 General Convention, TEC voted to redefine its marriage canon to allow for same-sex marriage. Of course, there were global repercussions. In January 2016, a meeting of the Communion’s thirty-eight primates overwhelmingly agreed that, as TEC was in disagreement with the Communion on a significant issue, it shouldn’t represent the Communion ecumenically, or in its principal elected standing committees, nor should it vote on matters
of doctrine or polity. The decision is binding for three years, after which it will be reviewed at the next Lambeth Conference in 2020.

Of course, TEC does have the opportunity to reconsider its actions, at its next General Convention in 2018, but TEC’s constitutional structures aren’t strong enough to address the issue, and Curry has already warned that TEC won’t change its mind. While he is being pre-emptive, and somewhat autocratic, his position is as logical as many of the executive decisions emanating from the Obama administration. To ask TEC to change its mind, with a sensitivity towards the global Church as the Body of Christ, is akin to asking the Democratic Party to conduct an open and honest post-mortem as to why it lost the 2016 election—without blaming the Russians, the FBI, or the Deplorables—and finding a workable solution for the future.

So, what happens at the 2020 Lambeth Conference is anyone’s guess. One possible scenario is that, by its unilateral actions, and through Curry’s pointed refusal to reconsider the implications of those actions, TEC will be collectively discerned out of the Anglican Communion because of its zeitgeist-driven obsession with LGBT issues. Here I’m reminded of my favourite feminist, Camille Paglia, whose Sexual Personae (1990) is a magisterial history of Western aesthetics. Paglia, who clearly believes in Spengler’s cyclical model of civilisation, says there’s always an obsession with homosexuality and transgenderism just before a civilisation crumbles. Our current obsession is a sign that the end is near.

Curry insists that TEC redefining its marriage canon in 2015, to allow for same-sex marriage, was all about doing what God’s love bids TEC to do. He said it was the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross, welcoming and embracing all of God’s children created in His image and likeness. The devil is in the detail here, as one can use the idea of God’s love, and God’s will, to justify anything. Further, it’s absurd to include the trans-gendered—whose gender identities are of human construction—within the Imago Dei. Like Obama, Curry is one of those liberals who parade their politics as a virtue while mourning the narrow-mindedness of those who don’t agree with them.

Curry stood before the primates of thirty-seven other Churches, and claimed that his Church was doing God’s bidding, which wasn’t far from suggesting the other Churches weren’t. If TEC is being carried along by the zeitgeist, that’s not the mission of the global Church. Dean Inge’s much paraphrased warning is still pertinent here: the Church that marries the spirit of the age will find herself a widow in the next age. While Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world, and while the Church is under existential threat even in traditionally Christian countries, TEC chooses to embrace Cultural Marxism, holus-bolus, with its eyes open.

**Abortion and infanticide**

I’m continually amazed by the number of women who say they would never have an abortion themselves but believe every woman should have the right to an abortion if she wants one. The issue is immediately placed into a hypothetical frame of women’s rights and desires rather than human responsibility and the public good. Notice we’re trapped in a rights-bubble where what might be is more important than what is. Pregnancy is not hypothetical. Abortion may be about responsibility, under certain circumstances, but it’s never about rights. The Christian moral framework is deontological, which means it’s about duty and obligation. Christians are bound by their duty to God through his covenants with them, Old and New. Christians are hated because of their covenants. This has always been so and always will be so.

Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, abortion and infanticide were permitted, because neither a foetus nor an infant were regarded as human. A child was only accepted as human, and only became a social being, when its father formally acknowledged its existence. Unless or until that happened, a foetus could be aborted, at any stage of pregnancy, and a child could be killed, left to die (usually by exposure), or sold into slavery. By contrast, among the ancient Jews and early Christians, abortion and infanticide were abhorred and forbidden. These different pagan and Judeo-Christian attitudes are simply explained. If you believe God creates human life, life begins at conception and it’s protected by the Torah. If humans take that life away, they violate the Torah, sin against God, and sin against humanity also. If you don’t believe God creates human life, then abortion and infanticide are permissible multicultural practices,
like marrying and having sex with pre-pubescent girls. Clearly, the West is returning to the Greco-Roman view.

Discussions about abortion are fraught because, in our politically correct world, no one wants to appear bigoted, and few are prepared to give the subject the consideration it deserves. Nowadays, each individual has their own arbitrary definition of when a foetus becomes a person, and therefore the arbitrary point at which abortion ceases to be permissible. To the ethicist Peter Singer, an atheist, the right to life is tied to a being's capacity to hold preferences, which depends on a being's capacity to feel pain and pleasure. As far as Singer is concerned, abortion is okay, at any stage of pregnancy, since the foetus is neither rational nor self-aware and can therefore have no preferences. A woman wanting an abortion always takes precedence, as the foetus lacks personhood, defined as rationality, autonomy and self-consciousness. In such a scheme, killing a foetus or an infant is never equivalent to killing a person who wants to go on living. It’s surprising, on an abstract or hypothetical level—rather than a concrete or experiential level—how many Westerners agree with Singer. Advances in in utero surgery tell another story. The medical profession can either correct a foetal defect, in vitro, or abort the foetus altogether. It all depends on whether the foetus is wanted, not on its right to life.

During the 2016 presidential election, one young lady at a Trump rally asked the Donald whether—should he be elected—she would receive equal pay, and whether she would retain her rights over her body. He said women should receive equal pay for equal work, and her rights were guaranteed by the US Constitution. Around the same time, at another Trump rally, Mike Pence clearly announced that one of the goals of a Trump administration would be challenging Roe v Wade with a view to having it consigned to history. Presumably he was speaking of conservative appointments to the Supreme Court.

It will be interesting to see how any moves in this direction play out. Surely it will be like trying to reverse the New Deal, the Great Society, the women’s movement, and the civil rights movement. Surely proposing that a foetus is a human being, and that it’s never okay to take a human life, will be construed as dark violations of personal freedoms. From the Left, there will be vast outpourings of confected outrage, second-guessing, virtue-signalling, name-calling, and carefully orchestrated moral panic. Christians will be attacked not because of anything they have done but simply because they are perceived as the enemies of Cultural Marxism.

In seminary I was taught that, while there are universal principles, such as the right to life, they cannot be applied generically to individual human circumstances, each of which is unique and deserves special consideration. If abortion is always sinful, there are the Twofold (Double) Effect Principle and the Lesser of Two Evils Principle to consider. Also, if the Church upholds the principle that abortion is always sinful, it also accepts there are a broad range of reasons why humans take life. Some of those reasons may warrant forgiveness of sin, but only if the sin is accepted—as sin—and only if the sin is confessed, and only if absolution is requested. Under no circumstances can Christians rationalise a sin as a good.

An appropriate pastoral response to abortion requires a great deal of patience and sensitivity. We are now told that terminations and even miscarriages have the same hormonal and therefore emotional effects on a woman as a full-term birth. In clinical terms, therefore, the possibility of post-natal depression after a termination or a miscarriage is real. The Church is always being accused of manufacturing guilt and shame, but individuals have emotions, including pregnant women, which the Church can’t ignore without abandoning its pastoral responsibility to them. The idea that a woman can have an abortion without emotional consequences is short-sighted. One learns about this in clinical pastoral education, which many pastors and trainee pastors avoid, because it’s challenging experiential learning, of an intense kind, but it’s important learning nevertheless.

Homosexuality and same-sex marriage

In a 2001-02 telephone survey of 19,307 adults aged sixteen to fifty-nine, the overwhelming majority of Australians identified as heterosexual (97.7 per cent of males, 97.4 per cent of females), and a small minority identify as homosexual (1.6 per cent of males, 0.8 per cent of females). According to later surveys, an even smaller minority identify as transgender or intersex, although at the present time it’s biologically or genetically impossible for a man to become a woman and vice versa. Also, there’s no such thing as an LGBT community with a shared cultural experience or a common ethnic identity. There are only individual letters in a label that Cultural Marxism uses for its politically correct purposes. Common causes or collective attributes cannot be assigned to the label. Individuals who identify with one of these letters should never be used as a poster person or a battering ram for progressive politics. Each individual has the right to be treated as a human being rather than a letter in a politically-motivated label.

Also, it’s wrong to equate historical prejudice
against gays with historical prejudice against lesbians. These were two fundamentally different forms of prejudice. Lesbians have always been allowed the fluidity to move in and out of the heterosexual world more freely than their male counterparts, assisted by Queen Victoria's insistence that, because they don't exist, they can't be proscribed in law. So, because lesbians were never breaking the law, they've always had the luxury of invisibility, in addition to fluidity, which they could use to their advantage if they so wished.

The Anglican Church interrogates the sexuality of an ordinand, if they are males, but female ordinands get a free pass through the gate, including lesbians. If a male is single, he's presumed to be gay, even in liberal dioceses. If he's been divorced, it's presumed to be his fault, since it's always the man's responsibility to keep the family together. If a female is single, she's not presumed to be lesbian, even in conservative dioceses, which will in any event restrict her ministry to the diaconate. If she's been divorced, it's presumed to be her ex-husband's fault, since she was probably a victim. Travelling below the radar, lesbians become priests and bishops, unless they are militant. Gay men are rarely allowed to travel below the radar, which suggests that the Church treats gays and lesbians differently, as does society.

I'm continually amazed by the number of gay men who say they would never contract a same-sex marriage themselves but believe same-sex couples should have the right to marry if they wish. As with abortion, the issue is immediately placed into a hypothetical frame of rights and desires.

Again we find ourselves trapped in that rights-bubble, where what might be is more important than what is. No marriage is hypothetical, however. What's absent from the same-sex marriage debate is any consideration of the nature and purpose of marriage, as a civil or a sacramental union. In Judaism marriage symbolises the mystical relationship between God and Israel. In Christianity marriage symbolises the mystical relationship between Christ and his Church. Same-sex couples do not, cannot, and will never be able to fulfil this symbolic role. I suspect most of them don't want to.

In his Michael Kirby Lecture of July 2012, Malcolm Turnbull spoke about same-sex marriage. “It's all about commitment,” he said, framing the issue opportunistically, in terms of his marriage to Lucy. He wanted everyone, regardless of their sexuality, in a marriage-like relationship, irrespective of what the relationship is called. He advocated universal fidelity and commitment. He admonished his own Roman Catholic Church. He even managed a plug for his future republic, a utopian place where his old friend and occasional opponent, monarchist Michael Kirby, can one day marry his partner. (Kirby recently said he has no plans to marry his life-partner and is taking a wait-and-see approach to the issue.) Turnbull is fond of moral posturing, and attacking straw men, but his views on social issues tend to be hapless and are often the kiss of death. He accuses the hypothetical straw men who disagree with him of “dripping with the worst sort of hypocrisy”, the “deepest pools” of which are “too often found among the most sanctimonious”, although his own rhetoric is sanctimonious as well as overblown.

Is same-sex marriage really about programming homosexuals to be like Malcolm and Lucy Turnbull? Is this what gay liberation is about? Or is this a creepy new form of puritanism? Is Turnbull talking about human freedom or another form of non-freedom?

In Australia, according to the Family Court's website, the rights of de facto couples are the same for heterosexuals and homosexuals. For this reason, there is a case to argue that, within the Australian jurisdiction, marriage equality is about symbolism rather than anti-discrimination, since it adds nothing to the legal rights and protections de facto couples already have under the law. In his essay “The 'Marriage Equality' Error” (Quadrant, January-February 2016), Peter Kurti goes a step further, by pointing out that Australia's legal system rests on the principle that the equal should be treated as equals and the unequal should be treated as unequals. By this logic, heterosexual couples are unequal, since males and females are different, and their difference is enshrined in the Marriage Act 1961. By this same logic, homosexual couples are equal, since a male couple is equal, and a female couple is equal, and this equality excludes them from marriage as a difference between husband and wife. The marriage act is not about equality, it is about complementarity, commitment and responsibility. The question of how to recognise non-heterosexual
unions, legally and symbolically, may be important but it shouldn't involve the Marriage Act. Regardless of whether one believes in evolutionary theory or intelligent design, male–female couples are different, and same–sex couples are the same.

What does the term discrimination mean? The dictionary provides two. According to the first, discrimination is “the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex”, as in “victims of racial discrimination”. According to the second, discrimination is “the recognition and understanding of the difference between one thing and another”, as in “discrimination between right and wrong”. Social justice warriors insist there's discrimination against homosexuals in Australian society, according to the first definition, but they rarely provide evidence, and the prejudice they allude to usually exists on some historical or hypothetical level. On the other hand, the Church does discriminate against homosexuals and same–sex couples, according to the second definition, as it should.

It's one thing to treat homosexuals and same–sex couples with dignity and respect and welcome them at the Lord's Table. It's another thing to treat them as if they were the same as heterosexuals and male–female couples, which they aren't and can't be. This isn't a fashionable view, but it's a biblical view, and it's a view that matters.

Because social justice warriors are insidious, we must recognise their tactics and be on our guard against their disinformation campaigns. A few years ago, there was a disinformation campaign about Cardinal Pell allegedly refusing to give homosexuals communion. This wasn't true. What actually happened was a group of homosexuals, their parents, and their friends, went up to the altar wearing rainbow sashes, to make a political statement, and Pell refused to give the sash–wearers communion (even the heterosexual ones). His point was necessary. God's altar is for sacraments. It isn't the place to make politically correct statements about identity politics. Leave your sashes in the pews. You can receive communion without the sashes. Of course, on Anzac Day many war veterans wear their uniforms and medals to Church, and to the altar, but that's a different kind of political statement. Let's hope we live in a world that still knows the difference between a social justice warrior and a war veteran.

In July 2013, at the end of a successful tour of Brazil, Pope Francis caused a stir on the papal plane. After saying at the beginning of the tour that he never gave interviews, he gave an impromptu interview for the press corps corralled at the back of the plane. He is reported to have said:

When I meet a gay person, I have to distinguish between their being gay and being part of a lobby. If they accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them? They shouldn't be marginalised. The tendency [to homosexuality] is not the problem ... they're our brothers. Who am I to judge?

Because of his comments, many thought the Church was suddenly going to normalise homosexuality and same–sex marriage. Predictably, a gay priest at the Vatican came out with his partner, for one of those staged media opportunities, but quickly vanished. The normalisation never happened.

Of course, a proportion of Christians are gay, including the clergy and members of religious orders. The hierarchy knows and accepts this. The laity knows and accepts this. Each religious order knows and accepts this. Having a same–sex orientation isn't a problem—as Pope Francis says, “Who am I to judge?”—but acting on that orientation is a problem, hence the vow of celibacy for priests, and chastity for religious, which applies to heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. Now whether clergy and religious are faithful to these vows is another story, and it's here that cognitive dissonance becomes a key factor. Each diocesan bishop, each religious order, manages this cognitive dissonance in their own way, according to their theological charism and workforce needs.

A few years ago I ran into an Anglican priest friend, at a conference in Melbourne, who reminded me of a prediction I made in the mid–1990s which he thinks has come true. Evidently I said something like: “It may sound paradoxical; however, the more accepting Anglicans become of gay men, as persons, the harder it will be for gay persons to get ordained, as priests, even in the liberal parts of the Church.” If this is true—and the evidence suggests it is—it highlights a struggle within the Church that isn't only about gay persons. In understanding the struggle, it's important to realise that gay persons didn't exist until relatively recently, there were only homosexual persons. Like each letter in the LGBT label, gay persons are artefacts of the contemporary world, constructed and deconstructed by that world. Because that world is fickle, gays find themselves pariahs one day, fashion accessories for the liberal elites on another day, and poster boys or battering rams for progressive politics on another day.

While the Church is deeply enmeshed within the world, it must stand apart from the world, and not identify with the world more than is necessary or good. People outside the Church don't get this standing–apart business and can't see why the Church doesn't just adopt the world's progressive
agenda, as they have. (Their profound ability to misread the Church parallels their profound ability to misread the nature of reality.) For both heterosexuals and homosexuals, the sexual revolution has normalised much that was once taboo. As a result, since the 1960s, both Straights and gays have been processing a difficult range of mixed signals, from the world, from the media, and from the liberal parts of the Church. All this makes their cognitive dissonance more dissonant.

Gays in the Church have been accommodated by the don’t-ask-don’t-tell principle for a long time; however, this principle is now in conflict with those liberal Christians who believe gays should be as liberated within the Church as they are within society. They couldn’t care less whether or not Father is gay or whether he has a partner. How progressive is that? It allows them to cock a snook at narrow-minded conservatives, which affirms something they need to affirm, and this is more important to them than Christian loyalty. Apparently God tells them to do this at the same time he’s telling other Christians to do something else.

Gays in the Church often take the don’t-ask-don’t-tell principle to mean they can do anything they want, as long as they’re discreet and don’t cause public scandal. While the Bible is silent about the don’t-ask-don’t-tell principle—and in fact says something quite different—there’s no shortage of gay Christians who rationalise their faith around this principle: the weekdays and Saturdays are for sin, Sunday mornings are for salvation, and—whoopie—they can repeat the cycle forever. They think it’s okay to have gay sex, or do any of the other things gay men do, so long as they don’t get caught, and provided they put their religious paraphernalia in another room while they do it. Apart from the strange belief that God and the heavenly host only notice them through icons, crucifixes and statuettes, their rationalisation is this: if society doesn’t proscribe me, why should the Church proscribe me?

On one level, this sounds perfectly reasonable, but it’s unrealistic, and there’s no simple solution to the dilemma gays find themselves in, apart from taking celibacy and chastity seriously, which is what the Church expects them to do. The simple knee-jerk solution of blaming conservatives doesn’t work any more, since the dilemma is really about liberal hubris. The sexual immorality of the Corinthians may be acceptable for pagans, and for secular Westerners, but it still isn’t acceptable for Christians. Read Paul’s letters for further information.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse ought to be an opportunity to clear the air, because the vast majority of child abuse occurs within the family, not within institutions, and because there’s no statistical correlation between homosexuality and child abuse outside of institutions. But if most child abusers are straight and married—and if the overwhelming majority of child victims are abused by someone in their extended family—that’s not how many people see the issue. This reality is influencing how the Churches are managing risk and perceptions of risk. If there’s something in each of our lives which we would rather not see reported in the media, this is particularly so with homosexuals. Trying to market themselves as gay or lesbian versions of Malcolm and Lucy Turnbull has been tried, in many parishes, but it isn’t the solution. Let’s be honest. It’s enormously difficult to be a social construct of the sexual revolution and also a committed Christian. We’re talking about perceptions here, yet the dilemma is real. When Christians see same-sex couples, they see the sexual revolution personified. They see everything that comes organically attached to gay liberation.

As far as I can see, a logical case for same-sex marriage, unique to the Australian jurisdiction, hasn’t been made yet. There have only been shrill demands for “rights”. But marriage isn’t about “rights”, it’s about monogamy, and monogamy isn’t a male response to sex in general, heterosexual or homosexual. For most men, particularly for gay men, sex is a recreational activity, even a team sport, what the boys do on Friday nights and over the weekend. Promiscuity is why heterosexual couples are finding their relationships increasingly difficult, and filled with double standards. That’s not a reason to introduce homosexual double standards into the marriage debate.

The future of the Church

To paraphrase Longfellow: God’s mills grind slowly, and exceeding small, but with exactness, while he waits patiently. Clearly, the Church is being chastised and the chastisement, in its present historical moment, happens to coincide with the culture wars. It’s unclear who’s behind the chastisement or what it’s for. There are different arguments of cause and effect. It could be that, because the Church is standing in the way of a progressive new world order, Cultural Marxists feel they must destroy it during their long march through the institutions. It could be that God is reminding the Church of how far it has strayed from his covenants, on Sinai and in Christ. Either way, the Church would be in a much better position, of being faithful to and fulfilling its mission, if it weren’t so disloyal to itself, obtusely adopting the world’s values instead of conforming to God’s will.

Clearly, the West is turning away from the
Church, and is either persecuting it or allowing it to be persecuted, and yet the West still has expectations of the Church. The West objects to the idea of biblical purity for ordinary citizens yet it expects Christians to be somehow different, especially the clergy. It wants the Church to float on the waves of public opinion, be universally civil to everyone, be acquiescent about everything, be simultaneously visible and invisible, and desist from issuing moral challenges and moral censures. It wants the Church to be a social-services arm of the state—service-oriented in education, health and aged care—but to remain silent about social issues. Is this reasonable or realisable?

Public ignorance about the Church is astonishing. The average Westerner has lost whatever knowledge their forebears had about the Church, except for dimming memories of old Protestant–Catholic rivalry. All they have to go by, now, are simplistic cartoon narratives, peddled by the twenty-four-hour news cycle, although everything one hears about the Church in the media is distorted, manipulative and intentionally misleading. It’s quite serious that so few can speak intelligently about the Church’s history: the First Century, the Patristic Period, the Middle Ages and the Crusades, the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the Enlightenment. In an age of mass education, where we think we know so much, never has there been so much ignorance.

As a Roman Catholic friend reminds me, even if the Church capitulated, and said yes to the entire liberal progressive agenda, it wouldn’t bring one single person through the door. There’s a paradox here, as embracing the modern liberal agenda isn’t the same as witnessing Christ to others. It may make us feel good but it does nothing for Church growth and may even drive people away. In his essay “The Incredible Shrinking Liberal Protestantism” (Quadrant, October 2015), William Rubinstein places this dilemma in its starkest terms of Church decline.

Occasionally someone catches me off-guard and asks whether I’m worried about the Islamic threat. Always on-guard against those fishing for comments to take out of context and misrepresent, I tell them the Bible is silent about this issue, and go on to add that my own focus is on Jewish–Christian relations, which are particularly interesting at the moment. I suspect many in the West want the Church to take some kind of adversarial position against Islam and are frustrated when it doesn’t. I also suspect these same persons are not really interested in the content of Christian belief unless it reinforces their atavistic fears and secular prejudices. Christians must be ever-vigilant against such people. I’m proud that, for the most part, the Church has remained consistently silent about the supposed Islamic threat and stuck to preaching the Gospel of Christ.

One cannot have lived through 2016 without sensing a tectonic shift in Western sense and sensibility. The shift has been interpreted in a variety of ways, as either good or bad, as the pendulum swinging from left to right, but it’s too early to predict how the Church will respond. In the Western Church, the influence of the Left is profound—even in conservative circles—and this will prevent the Church from lurching too far to the right. Also, we know the shift is temporary. As night follows day, the pendulum will swing back again. The only real benefit to the Church, of the shock of Brexit, or the election of Trump, is a warning against the dangers of liberal hubris. While its theology is complex and nuanced, the Church must be ever vigilant and focus on simple messages about core principles.

To those who see a Trump victory as a sign of moral awakening, or some great reversal, I’ve yet to be convinced. There are too many other signs that, ultimately, the West is too morally compromised for the insidious influence of Cultural Marxism to be reversed. For example, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies, is reported to have said about same-sex marriage: “Regrettably, our political process has been so tainted on this issue that an objective debate in parliament, let alone an objective vote in both houses, is beyond the capabilities of the current parliament.” Further, he warned, “the Labor Party will bind its members to endorse same-sex marriage from 2019, even though it is a moral issue to which the party was previously opposed”.

If same-sex marriage seems a trivial issue on which to risk the cohesiveness of a society, or a civilisation, the idea of social cohesion isn’t popular at the present politically correct, social-justice-oriented moment.

Clearly, the Church will only be allowed to participate in the world if it becomes what the world wants it to be. Yet there are limits to the Church’s capacity to be all things to all people. The big lie...
being peddled at the moment, in the media, and by the liberal elites, is that all religions are the same, and therefore Christianity is no different from Islam or any other religion. Christians aren’t allowed to call out this great lie, in the public forum, without being thought bigoted or promoting hate speech. This is unfortunate, since the revelation in Christ is ultimately final, and ultimately complete, after the revelation on Sinai, from which it organically grows and from which it is inseparable.

There seems no option for the Church apart from withdrawing from the world. That doesn’t mean refusing to witness to the world—or becoming inward-looking—but becoming more like the Early Church. All Christians need to become more conversant with what happened during the First Century, when Christianity was in fact a variety of Late Second Temple Judaism, before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The Church’s future is therefore, to a large degree, in its past. Christian apologetics is about providing reasoned arguments justifying Christian belief. It isn’t about arguing why the Church should be what Cultural Marxists want it to be.

The truth about the Church cannot be told in a lie by those who don’t know what the truth is. If the Church must forever keep the sins of its past in mind, and keep atoning for them, as it moves into the future, it isn’t limited to or defined by its sins, and they don’t detract from its core message. To put this starkly, in statistical terms, a child is still safer with a Christian minister—or with a member of a religious order—than it is with a member of its own extended family.

Irrespective of whether the West is sliding down a slippery slope, or the idea of a slippery slope is fallacious, the landscape is changing. Westerners know the Church has been fundamental to the development of Western civilisation. If there’s overwhelming evidence to support this fact, does it really matter if the secular world—and large parts of the Western Church—has forgotten the how and the why?

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