



# MELBOURNE CATHOLIC

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Easter and the real Jesus

Music, media and ministry:  
Fr Rob Galea

The Pope on hope

The Charismatic  
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10 things the bible  
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## [ Hope ]



# The Redemptorist returns

## INTERVIEW WITH FR TERENCE KENNEDY

[ Desmond O'Grady ]

Fr Terence Kennedy was born in Victoria's 'Ned Kelly' country on 28 December 1942. His father was of Irish background and his mother was from northern Italy. As a boy he was impressed by Redemptorist Fr Cyril McMaster, who gave a retreat at the family farm. Eventually Kennedy entered the Redemptorist novitiate. After ordination, he preached and gave retreats in Australia until, in 1975, he was sent for further study to the Redemptorist Institute of Moral Theology in Rome, called the Alfonsianum after the Order's founder, St Alfonso Ligouri. Now, after teaching moral theology in Rome for decades, Kennedy has returned to Australia.

### **What do Australians need to know about the Vatican?**

It's principal concern is for the unity of the Church. The Pope is said to 'preside in the community of love'. He is not bent on curbing local initiatives, as is often thought, but on seeing that all the local churches play as a team, realising their talents to the fullest. We've been through a period when the Church was highly centralised in Rome, a reaction to attacks on its authority in recent centuries. Pope Francis wants a certain decentralisation, where bishops and laity have more local responsibility for their future. The Vatican is not monolithic. It deals in doctrine but also discipline, social and pastoral issues—you name it.

### **And what does the Vatican need to learn about Australian Catholics?**

That they're not in the Italian mould. They have a fierce sense of fairness that has little respect for diplomatic adjustments and accommodations. Australians are strongly independent and don't like being dictated to. My impression is that there is some polarisation in the Australian Church

but it's not nearly as deep as in the USA. Certainly some yearn for the past, others are frustrated, feeling that authority has stubbornly blocked reform. Many have found new hope in the Plenary Council planned for 2020. The future of the Church lies with it.

### **Has the priesthood turned out as you expected?**

Yes and no. We were well prepared—but the culture became less supportive as we went along. I've always been firm in my conviction that the priesthood gave me a mission for God's people—in my case in preaching, teaching and writing.

### **What is moral theology?**

The study of everything that is truly human and how it is fulfilled in God's plan.

### **You recently attended an international meeting of moral theologians in Sarajevo. What were some of the emerging concerns?**

Violence, especially in emerging nations. And the lack of credible political choices. There were moving

testimonies of the Church working on the ground for peace and reconciliation, even in so-called 'failed states'.

### **Was there a concern about the Church not reacting adequately to the sexual revolution?**

Yes. Many felt the Church's teaching was not meeting people's real needs, taking into account the way sexuality is approached today. There was also strong criticism of the inequality of women in the Church.

### **What about climate change?**

Yes, it touched on the common good and the future of the planet. There was a detailed treatment of the ecological crisis in one area of India and the measures undertaken to resolve it.

### **What have been some of the highlights of your work?**

I was a theological expert to the Synod of Bishops Meeting on Oceania in 1998. The way bishops from different cultures (Australia, New Zealand, PNG and the Pacific islands) listened and strove



to understand each other was impressive. I lectured and took part in renewal courses in South Africa, American Samoa and Thailand and gave addresses in Canada, Poland and Croatia. For a month each summer for 29 years I worked in parishes in Germany. I wrote a manual of moral theology *Doers of the Word*, collaborated on a book on our founder, and recently wrote *What Catholics need to know about Islam* to help achieve better relations in our multi-religious societies.

### **Who were your students at the Alfonsianum?**

Ninety per cent were priests. There were some nuns and a few laity, but often their difficulty was that they had to find the necessary financial support to attend. We had students from 30 countries, usually aged in their thirties, and increasingly from the Third World. Pastorally orientated, they needed to complete their degrees or doctorates to return to work in seminaries or adult education. Apart from their vocations, they were interested in sport, sometimes in culture. Unlike the first students I knew in Rome, they were born after the Vatican Council, and heavily influenced by the internet, which meant their attention span was limited. They were not accustomed to reading widely and often had not learned to critically assess information on the internet. This seems to reflect a worldwide change in education and ways of learning which now have to be much more student participative.

### **What do you say to those who find Pope Francis confusing?**

You have to take into account his Latin American background. The Argentinian 'theology of peoples' considers popular devotions, permeated with faith, a place where God is at work. That is a basis for his pastoral emphasis. At times he seems like a Latin American soccer star who scores goals but it's difficult to work out the moves that have enabled him to do this.

### **His critics complain that his pastoral emphasis is at the expense of doctrine. They find his emphasis of discernment and accompanying people 'woolly' rather than delineating a clear set of rules.**

He wants to deal with people as they really are rather than relying only on ideals. There are two aspects of moral law. Think of a bridge—it is useful to have rails which will prevent you falling off but you also need a direction and motivations to enable you to reach your goal on the other side. Francis does not contradict the rules that keep you on the straight and narrow but he emphasises the direction, the inspiration needed to advance you on your journey. To this end, in *Amoris laetitia* he draws attention to parts of the Gospel, such as Corinthians: 'Love is patient, kind, not envious, nor arrogant', which are often overlooked. People sometimes don't recognise his overriding concern for the pastoral and inspirational. The Pope will never compromise doctrine, but wants to see it incarnate, motivating people to fulfil their God-given vocation.

### **The Vatican tends to blame clericalism for the sexual abuse scandals but others claim it is largely due to homosexuality.**

We shouldn't confuse clericalism and paedophilia. An exaggerated sense of authority found in clericalism can have a dangerous outlet in an abusive disposition. Clericalism is much wider than sexual abuse. It includes all forms of arrogance, misuse of power, a system where clergy 'lord it over' those without power as inferior. Many problems in the Australian Church might be traced back to bad or incorrect relations between clergy and laity. Certainly, sexual abuse by clergy is one form of clericalism. For those with a disposition to abuse minors, the clerical state can be both a cover for and an opportunity to commit crime.

### **What do you aim to do in Australia?**

I'll do what I can pastorally and I'll continue researching another book on St Alfonso Ligouri about hearing confession.

### **How can moral theologians contribute to the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia?**

By sorting out proposals, clarifying issues and deepening them. More importantly, perhaps, they can inform people about their dignity, their talents or charisms, and their rights as members of the Church by Baptism.