

Crisis and Opportunity for the Catholic Church in Australia

Since it began its work on 21 November 2012, the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into Childhood Sexual Abuse brought a spotlight to activities of both the NSW Police and the Catholic Diocese of Maitland and Newcastle. Commissioner Margaret Cunneen SC released for public scrutiny three volumes of the Report from that Inquiry on 30 May 2014. From this inquiry, evidence emerged that in both NSW Police and the Catholic Diocese of Maitland and Newcastle leadership has failed to act effectively in response to reported childhood sexual abuse by clergy. It is a shock to some, but no surprise to many that like deficiencies in ethical leadership and service have existed for decades in these two and in other Australian institutions charged with the safety, care, health and education of children.

The subsequent Royal Commission, announced by Prime Minister Julia Gillard on 12 December 2012 to inquire into the response of institutions in Australia to their discovery of the sexual abuse of children in their care, is still in progress. In this forum also, the trustworthiness of the Catholic Church is being investigated, along with other churches and public institutions which have responsibility for the care of children. During 2016, reports of childhood sexual abuse enacted by clergy and others with responsibility for care have continued to come to light in the Royal Commission's hearings at a rate greater than expected. They point not only to the extent of violence towards children in care, but also to the fact that those in positions of leadership in various churches and institutions have generally acted ineptly or have even covered up the crimes of the offenders.

Since the beginning of these inquiries, many of the following questions triggered by evidence given in these inquiries, have surfaced in media reports, talk-back radio, everyday conversations and in social media.

1. Why do some clergy and others in positions of trust in institutions abuse children in their care?
2. Why are we hearing only now that various kinds of child abuse have persisted in these institutions during the past 50 years?
3. Why are some victims of abuse only now reporting these crimes to the police and Church authorities?
4. Why have authorities in the Catholic Church, nationally and globally, generally dealt ineffectively with reports of abuse and complaints by those who suffered abuse?
5. Why have some clergy, whose sexual abuse became known to relevant Church authorities, been able to continue their abuse of children in an alternative context of ministry?

6. Why do Catholics need to depend on media reports and social media for most of their information about sexual abuse of children in the care of Church institutions?
7. Do Catholics, clergy and lay, know how and why the phenomenon of sexual abuse of children and adults, followed by ineffective remedies and even cover up, has become part of the Catholic Church's life? Is there validity in the claim that the general requirement of celibacy¹ for Catholic clergy and vowed chastity for men and women in religious communities is responsible for the sexual abuse of children at the hands of clergy and others in positions of leadership?
8. Has the practice of celibacy, required of Catholic clergy in the Latin Rite, and up till now generally respected by lay people, created an enabling culture and context for paedophile clergy to abuse children and escape detection and penalty?
9. Would a policy and practice of optional clerical celibacy eliminate the abusive behaviour? Some argue that if men entering the priesthood had the freedom to choose between celibacy and marriage then the incidence of paedophilia would be drastically reduced or even eliminated. Others reply that the relationship between celibacy, understood narrowly as abstinence by clergy from sexual activity, and paedophilia is hardly one of causality. It appears at this stage that any adequate explanation for the current state of sexual abuse of minors and adults in the Catholic Church will need to include an examination of personal, theological, and socio-cultural factors.
10. Are there other abuses of power in Catholic Church institutions?
11. Are there systemic causes for these crimes of abuse and their cover up by once respected leaders in the Catholic Church?
12. Will the Catholic Church and other Churches and institutions seek to regain their integrity in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commissions of Inquiry?
13. Will the Church, clergy and lay, be at pains to discover and then embrace what needs to change so that these distinct but related practices of sexual violence and failure in leadership do not continue to be an ongoing characteristic of its life?
14. Are Catholics, clergy and lay, determined to make whatever changes are necessary to restore the Church's wholeness? Does anyone know where to start?
15. If the response of the Catholic Church to the Royal Commission does not satisfy them, will more Australian Catholics withdraw their financial support, and discontinue Church attendance and participation in other activities?

¹ There are exceptions to compulsory celibacy for Catholic clergy. Permanent Deacons who are already married at the time of their ordination remain married, but may not remarry should that partner die. Eastern Rite Catholic clergy may marry before their ordination; only their celibate clergy may be chosen to be Bishops. Anglican priests already married may convert to the Catholic Church as married priests.

The practice of sexual abuse of children by adults and by other children is too widely distributed in Australia and globally to be regarded as something found principally among the religious institutions and churches under current scrutiny. Sexual abuse is encountered with regularity in families and in various public and private institutions that profess to be places of care, healing, protection, education and entertainment for children. The extent of this phenomenon suggests that a range of psychological, social, cultural and economic conditions contributes systemically to this failure to protect children at home and in the community. Based on their findings, the current Royal Commission of Inquiry is expected to make recommendations that include ongoing research to develop practices that prevent the occurrence of abuse in Institutions.

People with an interest in addressing sexual abuse generally acknowledge that those who engage in this violence are likely to be affected by predisposing influences that include their own abuse and neglect in childhood, perhaps at the hands of a family member, relative or trusted family friend. Wherever and whenever abuse occurs, its destructive effects are long lasting. Its occurrence in contexts of familial and institutional care is thoroughly shocking. The prevention of abuse requires that those who experience it or know of it report it to the police and expose those who offend; it also requires that suitable steps be taken to restrain, penalise and rehabilitate offenders. As well, no matter how long ago the abuse occurred, action is needed to foster healing for those who were violated. Some forms of remedial care are likely to be needed also for family members and friends of those who were sexually abused, as well as for the members of local church congregations and institutions in which the abuse took place.

The occurrence of child sexual abuse in any context or circumstance is so obviously wrong that it comes as a second shock to find that for decades child sexual abuse by clergy and other persons of authority in the Catholic Church has gone unnoticed, unreported and ineffectively questioned and challenged.

Why have many Catholics not immediately protested their abhorrence to this cruelty to children and hastened to denounce it with the same energy and persistence that some lay people and Church authorities show in opposing legalised abortion, contraception and same-sex marriage?

Why do Catholics who experience personally any abuse of power from clergy and hierarchy generally not call them immediately to account; even more so when they come to know of the sexual abuse of children by clergy? To reach an understanding of why many Catholics, clergy and lay, are found to disbelieve, ignore or cover up complaints of clergy sexual abuse of children in the Church's care will require honest soul searching by all. Until a different Catholic culture and practice is developed to resist effectively the misuse of power of all kinds within the Church, and implement wholesome and just practices of power there can be little confidence that there will be a significant change in the Church's

current shameful narratives. Now is the time for churches and institutions to discern, design and implement new and effective policies and practices to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all those in their care.

Now is also a time of opportunity, as the Royal Commission brings to a close its investigations and sets out its recommendations and requirements, for the Catholic Church, people and hierarchy, to reach for a vision and understanding that leads to changes worthy of the suffering of all who have been hurt by the violence of these practices of sexual violence and abusive leadership. Because the Catholic Church's search for integrity is in the interests of everybody's wellbeing, it ought to involve an open and widespread consultation throughout and beyond the Catholic Church rather than depend on an inquiry restricted to its experts only.

In line with his persistent leadership since the 1990s in confronting and dealing effectively with clerical sexual abuse, retired Bishop Geoffrey Robinson has promoted a petition among Catholics within and beyond Australia calling for a new Vatican Council to achieve this purpose of worldwide cultural change. Groups of laity, clergy and religious women and men throughout the worldwide Catholic Church have also voiced demands for Church authority to address the cover up of paedophile activity as well as the sexual abuse of women and men. Whatever approach is undertaken by the Catholic Church, if it is to have significant effect in removing abusive behaviour by individuals and institutions, it needs to include a critical review of its theological assumptions about sexuality and gender and its practices of power.

Power

Changes in the Catholic Church to remedy the abuse of power in response to the recommendations of Royal Commissions of Inquiry will not take place automatically even if the Pope were to issue a decree. The way forward requires Catholics, clergy and lay, for whom the integrity of the Catholic Church is a vital matter, to open themselves to a change of mind and heart – a conversion. Patiently and critically reflecting together on their experience of participation in the Catholic Church during the past half century will yield rich insights. How did this situation of abuse and the practices of cover up come to pass? Is there some distortion in the ethical formation of all Catholics that keeps both the hierarchy and lay people silent in a way that adds to the hurt of those who suffer from the abuse of power? It seems that most Catholics, from those in small parish congregations right through to eminent persons in Vatican Congregations, have learned to leave critical reflection on church life and decision making to someone "higher up" in the institution? The hierarchy's claim to authority and its characteristic distrust of the authority² that inhabits the lived experience of all

² Authority may be understood as power to rule over others; or it may be seen also as the work of authoring. Through attentiveness to their lived experience and healthy imagining for change women and men are capable of authoring and arranging their lives with integrity.

women and men is itself an abuse of power. A *“voice of the people”* consultation regarding sexuality and power could be a resource that both challenges and supports the hierarchy’s processes for determining policies and procedures.

If Church leaders accept the Royal Commission’s challenge to change, in their search for a new vision for power and for integrity in practice, they would surely benefit from inviting the contribution of those who have grown up in the practice of Catholic faith, including those who have discontinued this practice. Indeed, whatever wisdom and practical experience is available in global society also ought to be drawn upon so that reflection, imagination and deliberation might generate a vision and a plan of action for change in those ecclesiastical practices that are shown to contribute to sexual abuse and its cover up.

Learning from experience

Since Vatican Council II (1962-1965) many Catholics worldwide, maturing in adult faith, well formed in conscience and alert to emerging issues in morality and social justice, have hoped that they would be able to contribute more collaboratively to the life of Church and society. The last 50 years have brought varied expressions of lay participation, some of which relate to fostering spirituality and devotion and others that focus on developing more mutual exercise of power and justice in the Catholic Church.

Despite the intention of Pope John XXIII at Vatican Council II to open Church windows to the world, and even with that Council’s teaching on the dignity of conscience, Church leadership has mostly continued to expect Catholics to be compliant and depend on directives. Members of the Australian hierarchy have at times found a strong public voice to oppose abortion and contraception, but they are slow to consult with a range of Catholics who articulate their experience of new challenges and possibilities that they have found in living their sexuality with integrity.

After the issue of the Papal Encyclical Letter *Humane Vitae* in 1968, the strong voice of hierarchy that initially expected the laity’s unquestioning compliance in rejecting contraception slowly softened in the face of widespread lay resistance and the challenge of confessors and some moral theologians. Many Bishops then directed their priests to remind Catholics of their traditional belief and practice that an informed conscience is their reliable guide to moral choice.

The Catholic hierarchy’s response to Australia’s military participation, including conscription, in the Vietnam War years was influenced by their persisting cultural fear of the spread of Communism (yellow peril). With some notable exceptions, Bishops and clergy generally were not seen to encourage or support young Catholics who were risking jail by making a conscientious objection to military service.

A third significant factor in Australian Catholic life in post Vatican Council II years was the exit of numbers of women and men (nuns, brothers and priests) from their place within religious communities, parishes and other positions within the Catholic Church. A similar exodus had begun in the United States 5 – 10 years earlier. In Australia, in the 1970s, nuns and brothers who made a conscientious choice to withdraw from their community, some to marry or enter partnerships, found that they could often gain employment in Catholic systems for education and health that could not survive easily at that time without their experience, commitment and service.

A majority of priests who resigned from ministry in the last half century had come to question the clerical life style that required celibacy and expected them to exercise a privileged paternal authority over Catholics. A choice for intimacy and partnership meant that priests would need to withdraw from ministry even though some expressed their willingness to remain priests if they could be married. In order to marry validly according to Catholic Church³ regulations, a priest resigning from ministry required a dispensation⁴ from obligations to celibacy and obedience to the Bishop.

Their theological education had not usually equipped resigned priests to pursue a professional career in Australian society. Some of those who resigned undertook university studies or further training to gain access to the professions, business or industry. For decades, a large number of former priests have made a significant contribution in Probation and Parole Services and other Public Service departments in several States. Others have contributed to Australian public life through academia, government, law, health, community participation and the arts. The contrast between the hierarchy's restrictive approach to priests who rejected the clerical life style and left ministry, and the more facilitating treatment for those who had engaged in the sexual abuse of children is quite marked⁵.

It is hard to estimate the effect that resigning clergy, nuns and brothers has had on Catholic lay people. Priests, in particular, who left the ministry, were expected to do so without any explanation to those whom they had worked with and served. Similarly, any public acknowledgement of the priest by the laity was usually discouraged. Nevertheless, many Catholics continued to appreciate and befriend those whom they had known as pastors and educators. The example of

³ A priest who leaves the priesthood will generally be prohibited from employment in Catholic Church institutions.

⁴ The Church's ecclesiastical process of laicisation requires proof that the ordination of a priest leaving ministry had actually been invalid. Even then, Vatican authorities have reluctantly consented to grant dispensations to marry and the process has in some cases taken several years or denied. If a priest who resigns does not have a dispensation to marry in the Catholic Church, and chooses either civil marriage or marriage in another Christian church, that marriage is regarded as invalid. In which case, he and his partner would both be prevented from having a position of leadership in Catholic institutions.

⁵ It must be said that many priests who resigned for whatever reason have maintained friendships with priests who remain in ministry. In recent years, more Bishops are also known for their friendship with priests who have resigned.

religious women and men and priests conscientiously assessing their previous commitments in order to make new ones may have become a challenging and enabling example for Catholics.

Consulting one's own conscience rather than routinely seeking the permission of clergy to act, in the way that previous generations had usually done has become a more regular way for Catholics to approach their ethical choices, perhaps especially in terms of living their sexuality. It has become part of Catholic culture now that many people choose the terms for their participation in Church life. Many give important consideration to family events such as Baptisms, weddings, funerals and seasonal celebrations but do not attend Sunday Mass from a sense of obligation or commitment.

Priesthood, clericalism and sexual abuse

My intuition is that an explanation for the incidence of sexual abuse of children by clergy and other abuses of power in the last fifty years lies both in some emphases and distortions in the Catholic Church's approach to sexuality and gender in its doctrine and practice, and in its practice of hierarchical power. Clericalism is the junction point where patriarchy's approach to gender and sexuality and hierarchy's practices of power have been fashioned over centuries into an unquestionable structure of hierarchical male privilege⁶. In Catholicism and in other Christian traditions, clericalism distorts the meaning and practice of priesthood.

In Christian cultures, just as assigning privilege, power and responsibility to the male was adopted as the dominant form in which the Sacrament of Marriage has been envisaged and expressed, so too assigning privilege, power and responsibility to men through clericalism has come to be the cultural form in which the Sacrament of Priesthood or Holy Orders is expressed in the Catholic Church.

In the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Bishop ordains the priest he has chosen to work with him to communicate the Gospel message of God's grace. The priest is expected to live as *another Christ*, representing the Bishop, teaching creed and code, and celebrating rituals and sacraments with the Catholics in a parish or some other context. A priest is expected to evoke in the Catholic community the expression of their gifts of faith and ministry for the service of all including those who are not followers of Christ.

⁶ Within Catholicism, patriarchy claims superiority for males over females and persons of other gendered identity. Seniority and rank also operate within the structure of patriarchy so that senior clergy claim superiority over younger clergy. Hierarchy asserts that those who have sacred power through ordination are over all those without that designation. Pope Francis has been an outspoken critic of clericalism and an exemplar of avoiding the privilege offered to clergy. His critique of clericalism unfortunately does not draw attention to the distortions that patriarchy and hierarchy bring to the priesthood.

Priesthood⁷ has been developed in the Catholic Church as a sacred vehicle for mysticism and power. In terms of mysticism, through Ordination the priest is said to be changed into *another Christ*. This mystical dimension of his life is beyond the control of the Bishop and cannot be taken away from the priest even if he be found guilty of the sexual abuse of children. Vatican authorities may deprive him of the right to exercise some functions of priesthood and demote him to the status of a lay person. Nevertheless, in a mystical sense, it is believed that “once a priest, always a priest”.

In terms of power, the Bishop to whom the priest promised obedience and a lifelong commitment to service when he was ordained, may appoint and reassign the priest to suit himself and the needs of the diocese. The identity and role of the priest as *another Christ* brings a degree of spiritual, social and economic vulnerability with it. Vows or promises to live without intimate partnership, without accumulating personal property, and living in obedience to authority are serious challenges that expose priests, Sisters and Brothers to voluntary vulnerability and limitation. Clerical privilege has been developed by the Catholic Church over centuries and brings protection against some of the vulnerability attached to priesthood.

In some countries, along with many women and men who have protested against injustice to the poor in harsh political regimes, numbers of priests and nuns have been jailed, murdered or “disappeared” because of their resistance and courageous leadership in the face of oppression. In these situations, their status within the church was no protection.

Since Vatican II, many Catholics have encountered bishops and priests whose pastoral leadership is nurturing and collaborative, whose homilies and conversations foster earnest faith and action for justice, who acknowledge their vulnerability and enjoy mutuality in friendship. A significant number of Australians, working for justice and inclusive change in our society and globally, are sometimes heard to acknowledge that their convictions and passion for social justice had been influenced initially by formative learning experiences during their Catholic education. However, many lay people have also been so disappointed with the leadership of their priests, bishops and Popes that they walked away from regular Church participation. Some have left in anger, some in grief. Others struggle with a fluctuating sense of connection. For many, their contact with the Catholic Church is now minimal or entirely absent from their lives.

Clericalism and priesthood

⁷ John O’Donohue (1995; 43-53) distinguished between implicit priestliness, which is characteristic of every woman and man, and explicit priesthood. “Priestliness is participation in the creative and transfigurative nature of God. The call to priestliness is a voice whispering at the ontological heart of every life. ... The call to explicit priesthood comes out of the recognition of this deeper implicit priestliness” (46).

Even before men identify themselves as having a vocation to become a priest and enter a seminary, they have already been exposed to the clericalism that is long established within Catholicism. As seminarians, in training usually for a period of six years, they learn to live this hierarchical patriarchal clerical lifestyle towards each other and towards other Catholics. Their fraternity with each other and their loyalty to the Church predisposes them to protect the dignity of the priesthood by discrediting and covering up reports of sexual abuse or other behaviour that might be harmful to the reputation of the clergy. The phenomenon of closed ranks against complaint is known to exist in most professions and institutions.

Many Catholics have been inducted, through family life and education at Catholic schools, into doing without protest what the priest says or asks of them. In previous decades when sexual abuse had occurred and become known through whispered rumours there was reluctance among Catholics to complain or say anything critical about priests⁸. They anticipated that voicing a complaint would be likely to bring disapproval from their own family members and from others in the local parish. When a paedophile priest was moved to another parish, people not closely affected by the abuse would be relieved that it had not happened to them and theirs. It is not clear whether, since the disclosure of clergy sexual abuse through the Royal Commission hearings, Catholics would be likely now to take remedial and preventative action more readily.

Clericalism brings to the priest⁹ a secure place in the Church's hierarchy, a career path on which to progress within its politics, and generates an expectation that the laity will be compliant. Of course, clericalism¹⁰ requires

⁸ Especially through the decades when sectarianism divided Christians there was a tribal loyalty among Catholics that protected priests, religious women and men from any criticism or accusation of sexual misconduct.

⁹ Priests alone are authorised to confer some sacraments such as Eucharist / Mass, Confession (Reconciliation) for the forgiveness of sins, and Anointing of the Seriously Sick / Dying. A priest will usually administer Baptism, preside over funerals and is normally required to witness the marriage of Catholics for it to be valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The Church holds that even though a priest may be a serial perpetrator of sexual abuse or some other misdemeanour, the sacraments that he provides are valid.

Catholics, among other Christians, rely on access to sacraments to support their spiritual needs at significant times during their life. A decrease in the number of priests and the marked ageing of the clergy over several decades has led to Catholics generally being grateful to have a priest available to provide the sacraments, even though they may be dissatisfied with his capacity to communicate and act collaboratively.

¹⁰ "A cleric is someone who attempts to be a priest from the outside in. He assumes and adopts the uniform, behaviour and language of the institution. Ultimately even his perception and thought become institutionalised. The role creeps deeper and deeper inwards until it houses at the heart of his identity. ... The tentacle structure of the seminary reaches down even to the presbytery and parish structure. In this way the cleric is insulated against the longings and possibilities of his own humanity. This isolates him from the humanity of others; he keeps himself out of reach in a limbo within the metallic surface of the role. The clerical role subsumes the complexity, conflict and depth of individual interiority. It offers no context or language which is hospitable to the intimacy, doubt or sexuality of the individual. Consequently, these are driven underground and often surface in addictive or twisted form. ..."

priests in turn to be obedient, on standby waiting for orders. Just as many citizens in our society who are employed in institutions such as police, defence, politics, health and education wait for orders from the “higher ups” on how to act in changing circumstances, so too do the clergy and others in positions of Church leadership. Many priests comply with what is expected of them by the Church. Their security within the “sacred order” of the Church depends on their following their leaders. This may explain something of the inaction of some clergy in dealing with information about another priest’s sexual abuse. Used to expecting that someone higher up will know what to do and will have the power to make a decision they are likely to say nothing. And so a silence is kept that is likely to silence the voice of a complainant and privilege the perpetrator. In the clerical chain of command, many Bishops also appear to be held in such a bewildered silence waiting for someone higher up to act.

Clericalism is not essential to Priesthood. Priesthood can well be lived and expressed in a variety of non-clerical forms. The practice of having worker priests was an experiment in post World War II France and Belgium. Some priests, with the agreement of their Bishop, chose to live without clerical privilege among the poor. While they shared the need to find employment and the difficult living conditions of the working poor, they tried as priests to support the spiritual life of their neighbours. After some time, some of these priests chose to marry or not to continue to work as clergy. This pastoral experiment in Catholic priesthood was short lived; worker priests were withdrawn in 1954.

Some religious communities and orders, founded originally for missionary activity in a variety of third world countries, have developed culturally appropriate ways to form their members to exercise priesthood in global contexts of poverty, conflict and minority status for Catholics and others. However, the clerical lifestyle of celibacy and obedience is still required of those who are priests.

Seminary Formation

In response to a sense of calling from God, men in countries like Australia test their vocation to the priesthood and are tested within a process of seminary¹¹

“When role subsumes the natural rhythm of identity, it is no wonder that so much of clerical life is governed by fear. This fear keeps many lovely people confused and unsure, marooned on lonesome ledges in their lives. They usually opt to go along with things, even though their instinct is to disagree profoundly; subtle mechanisms of control keep them silent and ensure that they will never raise the awkward or wounded question”. (John O’Donohue, *The Priestliness of the Human Heart, The Way Supplement*, 1995, pp 43-53)

¹¹ John O’Donohue (1995: 47) “the seminary system is a highly questionable way to bring people to the priesthood. It usually weeds out the more creative and interesting people and allows the safer and more pious ones through. In subtle ways it takes over the initial longing of the one who wishes to be a priest. It works on the idealistic and vulnerable longing until it is safely brought on to the predictable institutional tracks. ... Seminaries tend to produce more clerics than priests.”

formation designed to lead to Ordination for those who are deemed suitable. At the time of their Ordination, through a solemn promise of obedience to the Bishop they are accepted as members of the clergy of a Diocese. Priests who belong to a religious Order or Society have usually made a vow or promise of obedience at the time of their acceptance by the Order or Society. They depend on the Bishop's permission to engage in pastoral work in his Diocese.

Through Ordination at the end of their seminary formation, priests are authorised to celebrate Eucharist and other sacraments, and provide pastoral care for those in a particular parish, agency or institution. The role of priest has traditionally attracted great respect and trust from Catholics, especially the poor who relied on him for guidance and sometimes for advocacy. However, clergy abuse and its cover up have brought a degree of suspicion towards priests, even from Catholics who continue to participate in Church life.

During their years of formation, seminarians learn to become members of the clergy as well as pastoral ministers, much as civilians learn to become soldiers – by taking directions and following orders. At the time of their ordination as priests, they enter the privileged hierarchy of dominant males within the Catholic Church. Being the dominant male in a Church community setting refers to the priest's social and ecclesial role. "Ask Father, he will tell us what he wants us to do." has for a long time been a way that many lay people in a parish have learned to settle questions among themselves that might otherwise require them to engage in respectful opposition, negotiation, compromise and collaboration.

In Catholic Church leadership, the privilege to be the dominant male in the community is clearly not about a priest needing to be either a dominating oppressive person or an outgoing charismatic personality. Like other professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers and academics priests may be engaging, courteous or personally inaccessible. Some priests may prefer to be remote and offer few opportunities for discussion about decisions and actions that are significant for the community. Other priests may be fearful of conflict with both Bishop and parishioners. Though most priests may enjoy providing pastoral and sacramental care to their congregations, they may also feel greatly burdened by some responsibilities of clerical leadership and administration for which they are ill suited and not well prepared by seminary education.

The essential condition for a priest's acceptance into and continuance within the clergy is obedience to the hierarchy of leadership that starts with the Bishop or Religious Superior, whose obedience in turn to the Pope is necessary to retain his place in leadership. The priest is appointed as part of a chain of command that gives him the right to determine the matters that are placed in his hands, according to the directions that he has been given. Australian Catholics are familiar enough with the isolation and even dismissal of some priests and bishops who challenge Vatican directions or make proposals about new ways for the Church to proceed.

Seminary formation, the practice of clerical life in dioceses and religious orders, and the exercise of leadership within a parish all usually equate obedience with compliance. As in other institutions such as the military and police, clergy sometimes manage the requirements of expected compliance through passivity, or strategies such as "If no one asks, don't say anything". In my estimation, the influence of the priest's promise of loyalty and obedience as compliance is a more crucial factor in the Church's practices of covering up sexual abuse than is the requirement of celibacy. The Royal Commission's findings and recommendations will need to relate principally to change in the system that generates the conditions for cover up. If the Catholic Church does not take hold of the opportunity to transform itself as a system then there is no guarantee that practices of abuse and cover up will change.

Seminary training in some dioceses still does not expose those training for priesthood to important experiential learning that supports reflective practice and personal maturation. Collaboration, mediation, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution are likely to be seen by leaders as challenges to the culture of directives and compliance. In the Church of clergy and laity, the direction of power is downward; obedience is directed upward. Once again, it must be said that in practice not all priests are compliant with the Bishop's directions. In some situations, this creates difficulties for lay people who find themselves caught between a policy of "Yes" from the Bishop and a decision of "No" from their local priest. Catholics have learned to look out for priests that will meet their pastoral and sacramental needs. Or just suffer the restriction. Or give up on Church practice.

Consideration for some dimensions of the priest's life and work influence some laity towards being sympathetic and disinclined to complain. Priests are often seen by the laity as being selfless service providers or servants. The priest's life of celibacy is often one of loneliness; the sacramental and pastoral care they provide can be tiring especially for those who continue to minister even after the usual retirement age. These factors help to maintain a reputation for trustworthiness and an aura of innocence in some priests that makes suspicion about their behaviour or any scrutiny unthinkable. Reluctance to think ill of the clergy who are seen to sacrifice so much is also an important factor in the unwillingness of many Catholic laity to believe complaints from those who have been sexually abused, thereby exposing the victims to disbelief as a second shame.

Concluding points for consideration:

- While some perpetrators of child abuse may establish control over their victims through terror, others mask their violence through grooming. It is possible to argue that for a long time grooming to comply with the power of the Church has taken place in Catholic family life, Catholic schooling and parish leadership. Grooming for compliance is also found in the

seminary formation of priests, many of whom sustain the grooming within their relationships with the laity. This culture of power imposed over and complied with by priest and laity inhibits questioning, initiative, challenge and resistance to what appears to be ethically wrong.

- Evidence has emerged that two practices within the Catholic church during the past five decades have betrayed the trust of Catholics and Australian society in general. A sincere public apology¹² to the victims of sexual and physical abuse that children suffered in church institutions for care and an appeal for forgiveness for neglect is required from the Bishops and other church leaders in every diocese. The second practice that church leaders have adopted showed a preference for avoiding shame and loss of reputation for the Catholic church. Steps taken to cover up clergy abuse employed ineffective means to protect vulnerable children from predators. An apology to Catholics is also required from Church leaders.
- Catholics have many questions about the incidence of sexual abuse of children in institutions of care. It is likely that complaints of abuse to adult men and women will also emerge in the wake of the Royal Commission's findings. Catholics seek reassurance that their Church will make systemic changes (remedial, developmental, and preventative) to its policies and procedures.
- A process of effective communication is needed - to explain publicly what steps are now to be taken to remedy past violence; to raise publicly the level of awareness of risks and what is abusive behaviour; to make clear how to make a complaint to police and to Catholic Church personnel who have responsibility and power to make effective responses. This communication needs to go beyond reading Pastoral Letters to church congregations. The Catholic Church needs also to communicate to Catholics who no longer participate in it, and the Australian public.

¹² Australians recognise that a public apology communicates sorrow that some harmful events have brought violence, deprivation and loss to some members of society. On behalf of the Government, or some other public body with responsibility for care and protection for those who have experienced loss, regret is expressed for their failure to prevent the source of harm or protect those who suffered as a result. These apologies have been sincere attempts to repair the torn fabric of society.

In this situation of child abuse and cover up, Catholic Church leadership appears to have two matters to address. Failure to exercise effective leadership is surely a matter for apology. In the Catholic Church's culture of Sacramental Reconciliation, it would also appear necessary that those who failed to lead responsibly would express their contrition through a public confession that asks for forgiveness from those who were violated and those who were not given sound leadership. It may be that Catholics, who did not act on what they knew to be happening in institutions, would also join in expressing their sorrow and asking for forgiveness. It is unlikely that the Royal Commission would claim competence to require the Catholic Church's leaders to undertake these specific steps.

- Patriarchy and hierarchy structure leadership within the Catholic Church and establish clergy as a privileged group within the Church. This clericalism distorts priesthood by requiring compulsory celibacy and their compliance with directions from members of the hierarchy.
- Direction from leaders “higher up” forms and maintains those who become clergy. There is a demand for obedience as compliance. Those charged with formation of clergy have themselves generally been formed in this mode. Reflective practice, which explores their human life experience and the ways in which Tradition addresses it, should be incorporated into seminary formation and ongoing professional development for all clergy. It cannot be assumed that church personnel are already committed to or skilled in reflective practice. The practice of regular pastoral supervision can be a constructive resource for clergy who want to live a life of integrity¹³.
- What Catholic Church authorities characteristically see as unacceptable in the unwelcome sexual activity of a member of the clergy with either an adult or child is his breach of his promise or vow of celibacy. A discovered breach, regarded as a serious moral lapse, is likely to attract reprimand from the Bishop, perhaps referral for counselling and transfer to another place of ministry. In any case, the perpetrator will be advised to access forgiveness for serious sin through Confession. Arrangements to remove the perpetrator to a different place of ministry are often made by church authorities to protect the reputation of the church and address the consternation of the local congregation. There is evidence that despite these steps the perpetrator may continue his habit of abuse in another place.
- What often appears to be neglected by church authorities is the factor of criminal violence¹⁴ and abuse of power that is present in clerical sexual activity that is not consensual. The church has tended to ignore the dimension of crime in the violence which has been enacted on the adult or child by a member of the clergy. That sexual activity has taken place with

¹³ Since 2000, a number of Christian Churches, especially the Uniting Church in Australia, have encouraged and required clergy and others who exercise pastoral responsibility to engage in regular pastoral supervision. Many testify to the value that this supervision for ongoing learning has had in their formation as ministers.

¹⁴ Violence is any physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural, or spiritual behaviour, attitude, policy, or condition that diminishes, dominates, or destroys ourselves or others. (*Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*. Laura Slattery, Veronica Pelicarić, Ken Preston–Pile, Pace e Bene Press, 2005: 33).

adults or children over a number of years is not an indication that it was consensual. Victims of abuse often lack the resilience to resist the personal power and ecclesiastical status of the clergy, who may offer them some tangible reward as consolation for the abuse or assure them that they are important in the life and work of the perpetrator.

- If the resolution of church leaders to make systemic changes in response to the findings of the Royal Commission is to be credible, there needs to be a commitment to generate cooperatively a new culture of community to replace clericalism. Whereas clericalism has foundations in patriarchy and hierarchy, the new culture of community will not privilege some because of gender or status.
- A new culture to replace clericalism will meet resistance from those who feel entitled to clerical privilege as compensation for restrictions imposed on their lifestyle by their status in the Church. The culture of community has Biblical roots that are a frame for each person's dignity.

Pastoral education for clergy needs to promote mature self-awareness, vocational identity, and awareness of context and culture through reflective practice. The accompaniment of skilled practitioners in pastoral supervision can support clergy and other leaders in the community to develop effective leadership in pastoral care through theological reflection.

This style of formation should begin in the seminary and be continued as lifelong learning for all clergy post ordination. Likewise, all others in positions of leadership in church institutions deserve similar awareness-raising education for reflective practice.

Because it stands for the dignity of every person without privilege, the culture of community challenges the violence of any kind of abuse.

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