

5 May 2016

Royal Commission seeks submissions regarding Catholic Church

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has invited submissions from individuals and organisations about any factors which may have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions, or affected the institutional response to child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church.

"The Royal Commission is inviting submissions on a number of factors identified through our work including canon law, mandatory celibacy and the selection, screening, training and ongoing support and supervision of working priests and religious," Mr Reed said.

"We wish to examine to what extent these and other factors have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions, or whether these issues have affected the institutional response to child sexual abuse," Mr Reed said.

The Royal Commission is also seeking comment and submissions on the current and future proposed approaches of Catholic Church authorities to responding to survivors of child sexual abuse, individuals subject to allegations of child sexual abuse and the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Submissions should be made by 1 July 2016 in writing to GPO Box 5283, Sydney, NSW, 2001 or via email to catholic@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au. Submissions can be anonymous.

15 May 2016

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REDACTED


A new Nirvana

Silence, Secrecy and Shame (the three S's) plus fear, are the sex offender's best friend and the child's worst enemy. The three S's have been coveted and nurtured within our Churches, and therefore our culture, for centuries.

The time has now come to head down a different path.

For a person who has a sexual attraction to children, a place where they can live and work without having to endure the pretence of a wife, a family and a white picket fence is bliss. Celibacy provides the perfect cover. It is a place where those in the greatest need, the most vulnerable children and families in society, are drawn. It is a place where people believe completely and do not question. It is a place that is generally respected and does good work in the community. A place that is generally trusted. It is in this place that children frequent because their parents and carers are confident that they will be safe from harm.

For the child sex offender, this is Nirvana.

In this place the offender enjoys the trust and respect of the community and of his peers - he not only fits into this society, he is revered. Here he will enjoy unfettered access to respect, faith and vulnerable children - and he will abuse all of it without a moments thought.

And if he does get caught, if a child, a parent or a peer does disclose, he can rely on this Institution to protect him. It must do so to enable the continuance of its good works and to protect the reputation of its good priests, nuns, parishioners and others who are the overwhelming majority within its ranks.

It is at this point that issues' of faith, morality, religion and culture are relegated to the backburner to make way for real issues of finance, law and business – a thing I call *Jesus Incorporated*. It is at this point that the ugly and shameful subject of child sexual assault, the guilt, the fear, the victims loyalty to the church – particularly when compounded with a powerful and aggressive opponent in the all-mighty *Jesus Incorporated*, take over - together they will surely silence all those who would threaten the bank balance or the perverse sanctity of this cruel denial and ostracism.

No wonder then that the Catholic Church has attracted so many offenders over so many decades – and so much distain.

For many such offenders, the Catholic Church was and remains a magnet – in here they have everything they need. And the hierarchy of this institution, developed over the many, many decades has attracted and promoted others of their same ilk and in this same culture. Here is a place full of likewise minded elders and peers who are either compliant or ignorant to the realities of child sexual assault. For them, this truly is Nirvana but for the children, it is hell.

But it is not spiritual or religious belief itself to blame; it is both the business culture the Church adopts and the blatant disregard for the human rights of children, which has nurtured them.

The toxicity of *Jesus Incorporated* has bled as red ink through blotting paper into the veins of the enormous good works and the tens of thousands of good people of the Catholic Church.

Times have changed and the Church simply must change with it. People expect more. The truth is that we all need more. There is a huge festering hole in the soul of our nation that is crying out to believe again. To believe in humanity, to believe in good, to be proud to belong – to again find hope and faith - without ridicule.

We need religious institutions with a failsafe moral compass, a transparent and pro-active advocate for a future, where children and human dignity are protected as a matter of priority.

The churches must invite 'Independent Others' into their decision making, to help run their risk management processes, their training, child protection education and to manage any and all disclosures. The ongoing reticence we continue to experience that keeps others out of this insular organisation is frightening. The historical lack of transparency and accountability lies at the heart of what I believe is a toxic and dangerous culture for children.

Of course, we can only guess that the church hierarchy and a large percentage of the religious decision makers are a product of this same 'magnet', building in ranks over centuries so that it is quite likely that today, perpetrators fill their ranks. So, unless properly and thoroughly addressed now, with the backing of legislation, I believe the problem of child sexual assault will continue to occur in the Church culture.

The time has come for all of society, our churches, our organisations and our families, to protect our 'reputations' by believing, supporting and defending the children and ousting the offenders - the reverse of what has been our past response.

Nothing less will honour the sanctity of childhood and the importance we must all place on our duty to defend it, without exception, every time – no matter what.

There is no greater power than that vested in the culture that leads our personal belief system and soul in its hands. And this has been the domain of the Churches. With this gift comes an equally powerful responsibility. The time has come for the Catholic Church to exercise this responsibility and throw open its doors to accountability and transparency.

The Catholic Church is in crisis all over the world but here in Australia, thanks to the Royal Commission, we have an opportunity to reverse this trend. Here the Church has an opportunity to lead the way to the future, a future grounded in transparency, and pro-active responses to this issue.

Here the Catholic Church has an opportunity to contribute to making Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child. It has an enormously crucial role to play. The question is, will it be ready to face the future or will it stubbornly bury its' head in the past.

On behalf of all the children of Australia I hope the Catholic Church will embrace a future built on the moral teachings of its Bible.

We can build a new Nirvana – this time for the 59,000 Australian children who be sexually assaulted each year and who are relying on the Catholic Church to get this right.