

Inaccurate Victorian Police report on CSA suicides amplifies survivors' trauma

There is no question the Royal Commission has highlighted and uncovered the appalling extent to which child sex abuse has been a caustic evil in so many different organisations across Australia.

This week the Commission started its 29th public hearing. It is looking at the Jehovah Witnesses Church and so far the evidence tells a disturbingly familiar story – children not believed, institutional cover-up, reputation ahead of protection.

Since early last year the Royal Commission has held public hearings looking at Government based health care providers, State Government homes, facilities run by the Anglican Church, high profile private schools, Jewish organisations, the Salvation Army, Swimming Australia, The YMCA, the Scouts and many institutions within the Catholic Church.

While I cannot speak for any other organisations it seems most have approached these hearings cooperatively and with a willingness to provide assistance where they can.

This has certainly been the case with the Catholic dioceses and congregations which the Truth Justice and Healing Council has represented before the Commission.

What we saw last week however with the exposure in *The Australian* newspaper that the widely reported Victorian Police investigation into suicides connected to child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church is, at best, factually wrong is a major concern.

The Victorian Police report has now, according to *The Australian*, been largely discredited by its own internal review. In an editorial this week *The Australian* says:

'After claiming 43 church-related suicides had taken place, police now concede the real figure was one suicide in which church-related sex abuse was a contributing factor.'

The editorial says victims of child sexual abuse who have 'fought a long, painful battle for justice' have had their cause 'set back by the incompetence of, and shameful distortions by, Victoria Police.'

The Police report, in its original form, has often been at the centre of many stories condemning the Church. Significantly, *The Australian* refers to it as being central to the establishment of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry.

Make no mistake; there is no doubt in my mind that there are many cases of suicide connected with child sex abuse perpetrated by Catholic brothers, priests and others. I have spoken with too many survivors and heard too many stories to question this.

But if anything is to come from the Royal Commission and the other investigations over the past few years into child sexual abuse we need to know the truth, we need to know the facts.

There is more than enough information in the public arena, and being revealed at the many public hearings, to understand that the Church and other institutions have failed children for many years in the most appalling ways.

The false claims by the Victorian Police should in no way give succor to the leaders of Church organisations that have been the focus of Commission hearings.

But when a report such as this Victorian Police report is found to be, at best misleading, then it reinforces in the minds of some that these investigations are designed simply as 'get the Catholics' exercises.

This is not the case and it serves no one any good, lest of all the survivors of child sex abuse, for it to be given any support by discredited evidence and reports.

The Royal Commission processes and all that surrounds it are traumatic enough for survivors without false and misleading claims dressed up as official reports inaccurately amplifying the horrors.

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