

Royal Commission Case Study 43

Catholic Church Maitland Newcastle

TJHC update



Wednesday 7 September 2016 – Day 6

Day 6 of the Commission's hearing into responses to child sexual abuse in Maitland Newcastle commenced with **Br Michael Hill** continuing to give evidence about complaints he had received regarding abuse of school students by Brothers Patrick, Romuald and Dominic.

Br Hill gave evidence about decisions to move brothers, appointments and other issues associated with offending brothers.

He gave evidence about the decision by the Brothers to reverse a decision to appoint Br Dominic as the principal at Marist Brothers Hamilton in 1997.

Bishop Michael Malone objected to the proposed appointment on the basis of rumours reported to him about inappropriate conduct by Dominic.

Br Hill said the minutes of a subsequent Marist Provincial meeting referring to Dominic's 'health problems' misrepresent the real reasons for the decision to reverse the appointment.

Br Hill gave evidence about how he dealt with Dominic as he became increasingly aware of his boundary violations and inappropriate behaviour including being sent to a facility known as Wellsprings. Br Hill told the Commission after returning from Wellsprings Dominic had little understanding of why he had been sent there.

Brother Hill said by about 1997 he believed that abuse had been widespread in the Order and not just a 'temporary hiccup'.

He said he was embarrassed now that in 1999 he had taken the subsequently disgraced Brother Romuald at his word when he said he had been wrongly accused of physical abuse. He said he had been 'naïve' to have believed Brother Romuald.

Br Hill told the Commission that as Provincial he had come to the conclusion that there were multiple brothers who as Commissioner McLellan described 'were off the rails' within the Order.

Scott Hallett told the Commission how he had been abused by paedophile Priest Vince Ryan as a nine-year-old altar boy. The abuse included masturbation, anal and group sex with other boys.

'At the time I didn't know what Father Ryan was doing was wrong,' Mr Hallett said.

He said he became angry about the church and what had happened to him and began stealing money from poor boxes. He told the Commission he had broken into and vandalised his school.

As an adult, he found it hard to keep jobs and although he had done well academically he would become frustrated with fellow workers and management.

In 1995, after speaking to another of Ryan's victims he told his wife and then spoke to the police about the abuse. After more victims came forward, Ryan was charged and convicted of sexual abusing 33 boys and sentenced to 14 years jail. Mr Hallett received \$360,000 in compensation from the Diocese.

Mr Hallett said he had attempted suicide in late 1995 and early 1996 and still considers suicide. 'I am still very shy and don't feel comfortable talking about the abuse,' Mr Hallett said. 'But I have got to the stage now where I just think: 'You have just got to get the word out there so people can be aware of what can happen and make people more vigilant about protecting the kids.'

'Once a child is broken, they can't be fixed,' he told the Commission.

CQS, a former student at Marist Brothers Hamilton, told the Commission about being abused by Marist brothers Romuald and Patrick in the mid-1970s.

CQS said that in year 8 in 1974, his maths teacher, Brother Patrick had 'put his hands down my shirt and into my pants. I believe he was trying to fondle my genitals and I remember pushing his hand away,' CQS said. He said Brother Patrick targeted smaller, quieter boys.

He said Brother Romuald was a very strict disciplinarian who caned and punished aggressively and that he was very scared of him.

CQS told the Commission that Romuald during rugby training regularly put his hands between the legs of students. 'I have had a lot of rugby coaches before and after and none ever used such a technique at training.'

He told the Commission how Romuald had made him undress in front of other boys, supposedly to show them how to find the femoral artery, and how he walked around the showers at the Merewether baths change rooms with an erection.

He eventually told his parents about Romuald and a few days later he and his father met with Br Christopher Wade, the headmaster.

He said his marks went downhill but at the end of the year, it was announced that Brother Romuald was leaving the school and the following year, in third form with the encouragement of a female teacher, he got some of his self-confidence back and was able to concentrate on his studies and sport.

William Henry Wade, known as Br Christopher, taught in ten different Marist schools and was principal at five schools. He was principal of Marist Brother Hamilton from 1971 to 1976. He said that he had a recollection of only one sexual abuse complaint against Br Romuald.

Br Christopher said he had confronted Romuald about the complaint which Romuald denied. However Romuald's response to Br Christopher indicated that he may have engaged in inappropriate behaviour in the past.

In response to questioning from Commissioner McClellan Br Christopher said he could not justify his failure to investigate further what Romuald had told him. Br Christopher said he was wrong in accepting Romuald's word denying the complaint and accepted that his failure to do so had devastating consequences.

The hearing will continue tomorrow.

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