

# Royal Commission Case Study 50

## Catholic Church Final Hearing



Thursday 23 February 2017 – Day 13

Day 13 commenced with a panel discussion on the work of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM), a papal body of seventeen members from around the world, which advises the Pope directly through its President of the Commission, Cardinal Sean O'Malley from Boston.

Panel members were Ms Kathleen McCormack AM, Australian member of the PCPM; Mr Bill Kilgallon OBE, New Zealand member of the PCPM; and Professor Sheila the Baroness Hollins, United Kingdom member of the PCPM.

The Commission heard that the PCPM is concerned with the world-wide church, and needed to come to grips with the different cultural issues relating to abuse internationally. Professor Hollins told the Commission that the work of the PCPM is conducted primarily through its six working groups, which have responsibility for drafting of response guidelines for Church authorities; healing and care for victims, survivors and their families; education of families and communities; formation and education of church leadership; theology and spirituality; and canonical and civil norms.

Professor Hollins said it was her view that Pope Francis is very committed to dealing with child abuse. Following the release of the *Motu proprio* 'As a loving mother' on 4 June 2016 the Pope had established a process through which any alleged negligence of a bishop in the exercise of his office would be considered. She said that where sufficient evidence was available, it was possible for a bishop to be removed.

Kath McCormack, former director of CatholicCare in the Diocese of Wollongong, has been a member of the Pontifical Commission since 2015, and is chair of the PCPM's Education Working Group. She told the Commission that education is the key to child safety, risk management and complaint handling. She said the establishment of CPS Ltd by the Church in Australia was a positive step, but its work would need to be supplemented by an "alert culture" prepared to report conduct that was not child safe.

Ms McCormack described the challenges faced by the PCPM in developing the Church's approach to child protection across the world, noting that in Africa child abuse is not even a crime.

Bill Kilgallon is currently Director of the National Office for Professional Standards in New Zealand. His membership of the Pontifical Commission also commenced in 2015. He has a background in social work and community advocacy including in response to survivors of child sexual abuse of children.

Mr Kilgallon was chair of the PCPM working group which produced guidelines to be used by episcopal conferences to formulate their response to which recommend the importance of safe recruitment and training; the development of a safe church environment, including education and awareness raising; a system for responding to abuse; and dealing with offenders and a system of independent audit and monitoring.

The panelists agreed that the Church as a world organization is struggling to come to terms with its responsibility to ensure the safety of children, however they were hopeful the PCPM has the capacity, influence and power to effect change.

The afternoon session was scheduled to examine the policies, procedures and reforms that have been put in place in the five metropolitan Archdioceses of the Catholic Church in recent times.

Panel members were Archbishop Denis Hart, Archbishop of Melbourne; Archbishop Anthony Fisher, Archbishop of Sydney; Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane; Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, Archbishop of Perth; Archbishop Philip Wilson, Archbishop of Adelaide.

The discussion centred on measures in place to ensure victims were heard, leadership and governance issues.

All agreed that the child sex abuse scandal was a failure of the leadership of the Catholic Church with catastrophic consequences all agreed the Church has an obligation to be a significant part of the solution.

Archbishop Fisher said there are individuals who need to take responsibility for the scandal but that the Catholic Church should hang its head in shame.

All Archbishops on the panel have issued apologies in various forms including in writing, in public statements and in private meetings, in person, via video, and from the pulpit.

All Archbishops outlined their efforts to listen to survivors and said they met with survivors as part of the Towards Healing process, including in face-to-face meetings and some have met with survivors outside the TH process and sometimes outside formal church settings. Each Archbishop described the structure and the nature of the meetings they have had with survivors.

Archbishop Costello said has made child protection the main issue in the archdiocese and that one of the big challenges is to avoid any hint that 'we're on top of the issue'.

All Archbishops said they have adopted a more consultative approach to leadership and encouraged cultural changes in relation to this, referring to the various parish and diocesan councils put in place after the Second Vatican Council, but noted that not all diocese embraced these opportunities due in part to the demographics and geographic isolation of the diocese.

Archbishop Coleridge said the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference works nationally but has no authority over bishops. He said that over the years it has shifted to a more pastoral modus operandi. He said the Royal Commission's work will help shape the agenda for the historic 2020 Synod.

In response to a question about what went wrong Archbishop Costello said the church had seen itself as a law unto itself, as special, unique and important. He said there was a profound cultural presupposition about the untouchability of the church, of not having to answer to anybody. But he said the face of the church is different now and unlikely to throw up an aggressively monarchical bishop.

Archbishop Fisher said the intersection of sex, power and religion led to the abuse scandal.

Asked about the role of governance, Archbishop Costello said while the structures are fixed, there's room for greater transparency, including through the release of an annual report and the publication of professional standards statistics, for example. He said the church has made a good start in ensuring a diverse mix of skills on boards, including participation of lay men and women. He said he doesn't recognize in the church today some of the contributing factors from the past.

The Archdiocese of Adelaide had the lowest incidence of allegations in the data due in part Archbishop Wilson said to a long history of lay involvement in governance post Vatican II, including the participation of women.

Archbishop Fisher said you can do a lot to engender a culture of compassion and empathy by listening to people who have suffered and exposing seminarians to challenging pastoral situations in prisons and welfare services for example. Archbishop Hart said there's a need for broad-based consultation ahead of the plenary council for 2020. The hearing will resume at 10:00am tomorrow.

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