

# Blog



## **The future cannot be 'business as usual'**

Francis Sullivan 1 December 2017

This week I spoke at a plenary session of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference meeting in Sydney. Little surprise that the main topic was the forthcoming release of the Royal Commission's final report.

Rumour has it that the report will be many volumes long and some will exclusively deal with the Catholic Church. Again, no surprises there.

Our Council was charged to operate for the 'life of the Royal Commission'. That time is rapidly running out. As part of our advisory role we will provide the church leadership with our own take on what these last five years have revealed and what the implications for the Church are contained within the Commission's findings and recommendations.

Even before the report is released the bishops and religious leaders must commit to a future that is not characterised by a 'business as usual' mentality. They cannot fall prey to those reactionary interests within and without the Church who jump at any shadow and too quickly cast any public criticism of the Church as yet another shot across the bow of religious freedom.

It is all too convenient for those seeking to defend the institution to play out soundly based criticisms in political and sectarian terms. The Church leadership must be strong about this. They cannot yet again seek to bolster the image and reputation of the Church by 'circling the wagons' and being selective about what they will or won't implement of the Commission's findings.

The damaged credibility of the Church because of the abuse scandal affects all Catholics. Some have remained resolutely loyal and passionately observant. Others have wavered and wondered about what the scandal means and how the Church will ever recover. Others have drifted away, silently, with regret, even sadness. Still others live in hope that this scandal will enliven the Spirit within the Church to engender reforms and transformation akin to the times of the Second Vatican Council.

This is far from an extreme position. Put bluntly, the Church has been revealed for all its hypocrisy and self-interest. It has let not only those abused within its ranks down but it has scandalised the faithful and those who rely on it as a moral compass and prudent guide.

It has brought itself to a point where serious discernment and spiritual renewal are essential. Episcopal authority must lead this.

For those invested in the forthcoming Plenary Council and synodal processes only genuine renewal, even rebirth, can be the goal. Let's hope that the bishops come out of their Sydney meetings setting a course that will deeply resonate with all of us who still hold out hope that being Church in this post-modern time is not only a relevant option but also enlivening one.