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Dear BPI

I apologize for the lateness of my reply to your letter of October 8th of this year which was acknowledged in my absence by Father Glynn Murphy. As Father Murphy indicated, I was in Rome at the time of the arrival of your letter on <sup>the</sup> five-yearly visit to that City which bishops are required to make.

I was distressed to receive your letter relating to the time when Monsignor John Day was Parish Priest of Mildura. I am not in any position to comment on events in 1966/67, as I was not a priest of the Ballarat Diocese and did not arrive in Ballarat until the end of 1968. As you will be aware, my predecessor was Bishop James O'Collins and he was in charge of the Diocese in those years. Both Monsignor Day and himself died many years ago - Monsignor Day in 1978 and Bishop O'Collins in 1983.

I did assume responsibility as Bishop of the Diocese on May 1st 1971. Your letter refers to events of that year and asks a number of questions. Whether I can answer them satisfactorily, I am not sure, but I am anxious to try.

In the first place, I should say that any complaints which were made at the time were made to the Police and not to the Diocesan authorities. Since the matter was in the hands of the Police, then it was not for Church authorities to try to intervene or to influence the course of justice and, certainly at the Diocesan level, there was no effort to do these things. Whether there was any effort to exert any influence at the local level is something about which I can only speculate.

Monsignor Day was certainly a figure of controversy in the light of his way of administering the Parish. His forthright approach to the Parish and parishioners seemed to polarize the community, so that there were some who were fiercely loyal to him and some who were fiercely opposed. This fact made it very difficult to make judgments from this distance about what was happening in Mildura. As I mentioned, the matter was in the hands of the Police and the Church did not wish to interfere with that process. It also became politicized to the extent that a Member of Parliament made a trip to Mildura and became involved. I have to say that Monsignor Day loudly protested his innocence of charges which were made against him. In saying this I am not making any judgments myself but simply stating the fact that he denied any wrong doing and continued to do so.

You asked why the Church protected the wrong-doers and let the lambs be slaughtered. I can only repeat that the matter was in the hands of the Police and the Church did not try to protect the wrong-doers but was content to let the judicial process take its course.

Monsignor Day was not really "whisked away, hidden and then protected from all lawful and deserving penalty". He was removed from his position as Parish Priest, because it was clear that whatever about the allegations which had been made against him, the Parish was in such turmoil that there was no way in which he could continue to operate effectively as Parish Priest. As I stated, he continued to protest his innocence. He was not rushed off to the Vatican to be rewarded for his work. I think that he did take an overseas trip during the twelve month period when he did not have a parish appointment. This trip was undertaken of his own volition and as a holiday.

You asked why Monsignor Day was given another appointment. When the Parish of Timboon became vacant in 1973, he applied for it and insisted on his right to a pastoral appointment and pointed to the fact that the Police had not taken action against him despite the complaints which had been made. The Diocesan Consultors of the time who were advising me felt that there was no alternative but to give him the appointment which he sought. Accordingly, I appointed him to Timboon in January 1973. I did not receive any complaint about his behaviour in Timboon and would certainly have followed up on any complaint which had been made.

You claim that I was wrong in the way I handled this situation and, if I was wrong then I am sorry. Perhaps I did not have all of the facts at my disposal, but I could only be guided by the decision of the Police after their investigations and by the advice which I sought. Incidentally, in regard to your comment concerning the recognition of the goodness of John Howden, at least I can advise that one of the wings of the Sacred Heart College at Mildura is named after him.

I am deeply sorry that you found it necessary to write and for any hurt which you may have suffered. I am also sorry that these matters have been raised again in your memory in the light of the tragic events of more recent years. Unfortunately, the Church is made up of both saints and sinners. When people in positions of trust offend, then the whole Church suffers. But it is not the whole Church which is to blame. I do pray that there can be an opportunity for your own reconciliation with the Church and with the Catholic faith which is bigger and more important than the activities of one or another Church member, even should that member be or have been in the past a priest.

With every blessing and best wish.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Bishop of Ballarat