

## Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

### Summary of Views (Panel 2)

1. *Issues contributing to occurrence of abuse and affecting the institutional response:*
  - a. Historically shaped (at least since the eleventh century) by a strong sense of hierarchy, possessing what is classically called “the power of the two swords,” i.e., authority in both religious and secular matters that concern the well-being of the Church. This has led to strong *downward* exercise of authority, and extreme difficulty in going the other way. Consequence: a sense of the “superiority” of hierarchy, clergy, and full-time religious people, and a sense of the untouchable “holiness” of the Church and its ministers. This has led to extremely cumbersome processes where the Vatican has established itself as the final authority (e.g. the application of canonical penalties, including laicization). Perhaps more insidious is the existence of an “aura of superiority” around Bishops, Priests and Religious, uncritically accepted by believing Catholics (see c. below: “clericalism”). Associated with this is the theological issue of the “sacramental” nature of the Priesthood, locating the priestly ministry as a specially called and gifted agent in the sacred dialogue between God and humankind. These critical and complex issues, superficially stated here, are being powerfully rejected by the present Pope Francis, amidst strong opposition from people who are resisting change.
  - b. It is unjust to apply a blanket summary of issues related to the *individual* leadership of Catholic institutions. For centuries, Catholic institutions have cared for the sick, educated the poor, provided leadership in times of crisis, even risking death, and generally dedicated themselves to the betterment of society at large. Outstanding leaders at every level have made this possible. However, the structures and contexts generated by what I have described under 1 a. have impinged upon the leadership of many Catholic institutions. Concern with the orders and required approvals “from above” sometimes generates timid leadership. Associated with this, in some cases, too many good men and women who were by nature “receptive” to orders from above, and hesitant to strike out boldly, have been appointed to major leadership positions, especially episcopacies. Faced with the horrors of sexual abuse, they have tended to shirk the issue for decades, waiting to be told what to do about it from “inside the Church.” The issues were in fact matters of a serious criminal nature that should have been handled by the correct civil authority. While I wish to affirm that weak and subservient leadership, unable to grasp the nettle, has played a damaging role, I wish to repeat that those who have failed are outnumbered by many courageous and creative leaders.
  - c. Clericalism is one of the most serious plagues of the Catholic Church. It has been created by the history outlined in 1 a., and continues to be a major issue,

especially among younger people presenting themselves today for ministry. They are anxious to wear special dress, to present themselves as “superior” to others, and generally have difficulty in relating to a society that rightly does not recognize their pretensions. Two points: (1) many weak individual leaders (cf. 1 b.) fall back upon the trappings of clericalism to affirm their authority (2) the ongoing danger of that *some* current people assuming “clerical” roles in the Catholic Church will “abuse” their so-called authority.

2. *Failings of individuals/systemic factors*: Both are clearly involved. Some of the most dreadful crimes that have been committed within the institution of the Catholic Church are the acts of serious pedophiles who would have been a scourge in society, whether or not they had been in that institution. They – and not the institution – must be held personally responsible, and duly punished by society. The institutional issue has at least two sides:
  - a. The mission of the Catholic Church, especially in the education of the young, provided settings within which such criminal activities were made easier than in society at large, especially when associated with the “clericalism” factor (e.g., Catholic family support for the offender).
  - b. The institution itself was culpably unprepared for this phenomenon. The Catholic Church “took it for granted” that its ministers would live by the Gospel, and the Ten Commandments, not to speak of the apostolic charism of the singular Religious Orders. This naïveté led to poor reception of complaints, and a “soft” handling of the perpetrator. Initially it was “hard to believe” that such things were happening. The issue outlined above in 1 a. led to a slowness to act, and the expectation that “someone from above” would solve things.
  
3. *Failings in institutional response due to the failings of responsible individuals*. Historically, this has clearly been the case. The response to this question is closely related to what I have already written. The structure, governance and culture resulting from what has been outlined under the 1 a b. c., especially the *downward* exercise of authority, and the difficulty encountered when trying to take things *upward* simply does not work in contemporary society. The Commission, which must be listened to by all responsible individuals in the Catholic Church, from the Pope to any active Catholic, could help by positively affirming the need for more careful scrutiny of candidates placed in leadership positions, more open processes, and a greater democratization of all canonical matters. Especially important: these processes be taken away from the Vatican, and be situated *locally* (e.g. acceptance of complaints, care of the victims, immediate laicization, ongoing security and care of the perpetrators, etc.).