

**The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse:  
Catholic Church Final Hearing (Issues Paper 11)  
Panel 3 (Public hearing, 8 Feb, 2016) — ‘Structure, governance and culture’  
Summary Notes of Peter Johnstone OAM**

**A key question:** *How could the leadership of the Catholic Church effectively facilitate clerical child sexual abuse, whilst espousing Christian values that condemn such behaviour?*

- Peter Johnstone is President of Catholics for Renewal Inc, a group of committed Catholic Christians who follow the teachings of Christ on the values by which we should live our lives, and who expect their Church to be guided by those teachings. Catholics for Renewal has made several detailed submissions to the Royal Commission and to the former Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry that inform the personal views expressed here.
- The systemic structure, governance and culture of the global Church fails the Church’s mission, as shown horribly in the scandal of clerical child sexual abuse. The Holy See (Vatican) determines that governance, which is accepted by Church leaders who have apparently lost their way. The primary focus here is on the hierarchical Church which also impacts religious orders and other Church organisations with diverse outcomes.
- This global dysfunctional governance fails secular standards and the teachings of Christ. The Church prioritised its institutional reputation over the lives of children, forfeiting its moral credibility. The Church throughout the world, under direction of the Holy See, protected criminal paedophiles and thus enabled further child sexual abuse.
- Canon law, the general law of the Church promulgated by the Holy See but not limited to the formal Code of Canon Law, prevents reporting of clerical paedophilia cases to civil authorities through the ‘pontifical secret’; an exception was introduced in 2010 for cases where local civil law mandates reporting, apparently introduced to protect church authorities from the law rather than children from sexual abuse. I (and Catholics for Renewal) submit that criminal reporting of child sexual abuse should be mandatory. It is sad that compulsion is necessary for the Church to meet a clear moral responsibility.
- Recent popes have issued multiple apologies for the crimes of paedophile clerics, but have not apologised for, or addressed, the Church’s institutional role in actually protecting those paedophiles at the cost of further sexual abuse of children.
- The governance model of the Catholic Church is essentially monarchical and autocratic at all hierarchical levels - Holy See, diocese, and parish – and fails basic governance principles critical to a good society and to the teachings of Christianity, such as accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and subsidiarity. Those governance principles have become foreign concepts in the governance of the Church.
- Despite the local authority of dioceses and parishes, the Church is centrally governed. That central authority has limited regard for the principle of subsidiarity, with many routine matters of canon law and pastoral ministry determined by the Holy See.
- Church governance in law and practice excludes women almost entirely from key decision-making, implicitly denying their equality but also rejecting the importance of gender balance to good leadership and decision making, an importance recognised in modern society and

businesses. The patriarchal and clericalist nature of the all-male hierarchy is worsened by mandatory celibacy which further cocoons male clerical autocrats and Church governance from female influence.

- As seen in evidence the all-male hierarchy, from the Holy See to parish priests (with a strong governance responsibility in Victoria for parish schools), can routinely make decisions autocratically, in secret, and without the participatory processes and the discipline of external scrutiny that inform good leadership and ensure accountability.
- An organisation's culture is critical to its governance practices. The Church's toxic clericalist culture was a key element in clerical child sexual abuse, asserting the superiority of male, unmarried clerics (now increasingly ageing) operating in a patriarchal autocratic environment, above scrutiny and lacking moral accountability; that culture determines clerical behaviour, with acquiescence of the laity or their alienation.
- Fundamental global governance reform is required. While the dysfunctionality of the Catholic Church's global governance and toxic culture continues, local reforms of processes and structures will have limited value; governments across the world cannot rely on such local reforms being adequate to protect children in the future.
- It is impossible for the Church to engage in real reform without genuinely addressing:
  - a) its moral failure in the cover-up and protection of paedophiles at the cost of the wellbeing and indeed the lives of children, and
  - b) the lack of accountability, transparency and inclusiveness in the Church's structure, governance and culture.

A form of grave denial exists in the Church's leadership.
- Changes in Church governance must ensure accountability, transparency and inclusiveness, with cultural transformation and genuine subsidiarity. Good governance will require cultural and structural change to involve all the faithful, particularly women, in the governance of the Church, with transparent and accountable planning and decision making at all levels. Such reform would necessarily include, inter alia, a review of Canon Law and inclusive bishop selection processes with meaningful performance appraisal.
- The Royal Commission should censure the dysfunctional global governance of the Catholic Church as unacceptable in any organisation in our society, even more so organisations with responsibilities for children, particularly when such an organisation benefits from civil privileges. That privileged status assumes that the Church promotes values endorsed by civil society. The Church's governance has resulted in the destruction of children's lives and the Royal Commission should demand effective accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and subsidiarity in the structure, processes and culture of the Church globally to ensure its good governance in Australia.
- Pope Francis has recognised the need for global Church governance reform in *Evangelii Gaudium*, referring to: "***the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures (being) suitably channelled for the evangelisation of to-day's world rather than for her self-preservation***"<sup>1</sup> (bolding added). The need is immediate.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium – Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*. (Rome: Vatican/St Paul's Publications, 2013), 27