

Panel 6: Formation of Clergy and Religious (2)

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Selection and Screening

- *How it was done:*
 - Letter from parish priest
 - Reference from solid citizen
 - Desire to become a priest: come test a vocation. Leaving was poorly done, eliciting a sense of failure
 - Interview with panel: can you genuflect?
 - 7 years program allows time for attrition
- 32 enter, 16 ordained; 8 continued in ministry
- Compliance, lest dismissed

Formation

- *Where was it done:*
- Isolated, on the outskirts of city, seeking perfection away from distractions of family, friends, world. No papers or tv. Let the rest of the world go by. It did, until the late 1960s. (Moon, Beatles, adolescent rebellion) The Christian Traditions were isolated from each other, nurturing a suspicious or wary Us/Them mentality. Vatican II changed language and thence attitudes from “separated brethren” to “brothers and sisters in Christ.

Identity: If a priest settles for ordination as his deepest identity, he sees priesthood as a state to be entered, rather than a life to be lived for others. It is dangerous when Holy Order (which can only be properly understood in relation to its opposite, Unholy Disorder) is seen as making one ‘ontologically’ different and superior to others. Such clericalism engenders a false sense of entitlement.

Robert McClory¹ describes it as becoming “members of a boys club that is warm, supportive and exclusive – and never breaks ranks. Some priests’ membership of the boys club is loose. For many more priests it is non-existent. But clericalism is insidious, breeding ambition, status and power, and indifference towards the needs of others.”² I have seen highly competent, professional people turn to the jelly of compliance when ‘Father’ brings up a crazy idea at the Parish Council. The rigorous, transparent and accountable decision-making that are part of his or her daily work can evaporate ‘when Father speaks.’ Such compliance suggests the presence of clericalism, whether or not the priest ‘buys’ it or not. Because priests dressed and lived differently, they were assumed to be holier than others. I remember meeting a religious sister not long after ordination, what’s your name, Father? I said: John. To which she replied, no, its Fr. Story of a priest who insisted his mother call him ‘father’.

- All this time, that amorphous thing called *culture*, the environment we live in, unawares was being formed. There are many layers to culture, the shared pattern of beliefs, values, norms and assumptions that consistently drives the behaviour of an organisation. I will offer my take on this a little later.

Appointment and Training of Staff

- A majority of staff had post-grad degrees, mainly from Roman Theologates; later from France, Belgium, England, Wales, Canada and US.
- Like Uni staff, taught without formal teaching qualifications.
- Focus on academic staff; no comprehensive pastoral formation. That happened, usually effectively in years after ordination. Priests would learn on the job. Some pastors were great teachers of young priests; families drew priesthood out of priests as children draw parenthood out of parents.

¹ Robert McClory, “The New Pope’s Real Target: Clericalism” in *National Catholic Reporter* April 4, 2013

² George Wilson (2008) *Clericalism* Collegeville: Liturgical Press p7

Ongoing Formation

- Annual retreat
- Regular spiritual direction
- Recitation of Divine Office
- Several groups: Monday golf, cards
- Many priests were great readers
- No ongoing, comprehensive program of updating

Factors Mentioned as Having Contributed to Abuse

Celibacy has little, if any, direct impact on the occurrence of child abuse. Most abusers are married or not celibate. However, enforced celibacy may create an environment that does not enhance cognitive, emotional, behavioural or spiritual intimacy.³

How we **name ourselves** shapes our understanding of and our relationship to power or rather to our way of exercising authority. One common naming of priests has been *alter Christus*, a Latin phrase meaning an ‘other Christ’. In fact we already have one Christ. As well, if anyone might be called an ‘other Christ’, it applies to the whole Christian community, not just the priest, alone. This is an example of an image of reality being mistaken for the reality itself.

Naming child abuse as a personal **moral flaw** has unwittingly contributed to the ongoing occurrence of abuse. Abuse is a moral failing but it is more than that. It is criminal behaviour. If it is seen only as a moral failure, it is always possible to turn one’s life around. Notice how the focus is on the offender, rather than on the victim. The church has been too trusting, too optimistic that the programs

³ Cognitive intimacy sees two people talking about themselves, what they are thinking, hoping, fearing. Emotional intimacy cares about the other, the impacts on their lives. Behavioural intimacy sees people sharing time together. Spiritual intimacy sees two people praying together, living out a shared understanding of humanity, sin and grace.

for the rehabilitation of priest-offenders would ‘work’ for all three categories of offender: preferential, situational and indiscriminate.

I don’t see the Sacrament of Reconciliation, **Confession** as contributing to the occurrence of abuse. In my 42 years as a confessor, no-one has ever confessed abusing children. If that were to occur, I would urge the person to self-report to the police. Since paedophiles and ephebophiles are self-delusional, they wouldn’t admit having done anything wrong. Why would they go to reconciliation? If a situational offender came to reconciliation, I would urge him to self-report to police.

Factors that underpinned the Church’s Response to Abuse

To this time the church’s response to abuse seems to me to be seriously inadequate due to a lack of understanding of:

- The nature of abuse
- The lifelong impact of abuse on its victims: ‘abuse isn’t over when it’s over’⁴
- How victims could be damaged and re-traumatised
- Abuse as the perpetrator’s serious personal flaw
- The effectiveness of therapy and pastoral care changing an offender
- Church leaders desire to protect the good name of the church at all costs

The Culture that emerged over the years, mostly unawares, was the major causal factor of the Church’s response to abuse.

- *Layers of Culture:*

⁴ James Poling (1991) *The Abuse of Power* Nashville: Abingdon Press p94

artifacts	explicit	implicit
Distinctive house and attire	alter Christus	world is depraved
History, heroes and villains, myths	Learning from Latin textbooks, start with theory, not experience	I've given up so much; fosters a sense of entitlement
Priests don't surf	we don't 'caress conflict'	Priest has unique power.
divine office	Does he turn up consistently for chapel?	Not just different but superior
all male environment annuls capacity to reflect and relate (intimacy)	Ontological change: metaphor or reality?	

What's Changed?

Seminarians take classes with female and male students and lecturers. A comprehensive pastoral program has been refreshed and expanded to include courses on *Power, Authority, Leadership, Exploring Parish Culture* and *Facilitating Adult Learning*. The Spiritual Director holds formal qualifications in Spirituality. Child Abuse and human sexuality have become part of the explicit curriculum. I further propose that seminarians might gain from undertaking workshops on:

- Understanding what happened at the Royal Commission
- What behaviours are/aren't appropriate with young and vulnerable
- Abuse isn't over when it's over
- Inside the skin of a victim
- Inside the skin of an offender

Conclusion

In light of the evidence given to the Royal Commission some key dimensions of a new culture:

1. It will no longer be possible to claim that ‘we didn’t know’ about sexual abuse.
2. It will no longer be possible to see an offender’s abuse as a personal flaw rather than a crime from which a victim never recovers fully.
3. It will no longer be possible to blame only the perpetrator. While one person may be guilty, all of us are responsible, and few more so than the churches who offer themselves as “artisans of a new humanity”, providing “coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.”⁵
4. It will no longer be possible for priests to imagine they are free from the expressions and obligations of accountability and transparency that are routine in workplaces across Australia.
5. It will no longer be possible to imagine that clericalism has anything to do with God. It deserves to be called out when it occurs.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* #30-31