

Panel 6: Formation of Clergy and Religious

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Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the work of the Royal Commission. I have no experience of working with religious orders, so I will confine my remarks to the screening and formation of seminarians at Brisbane's Banyo Seminary, where I was involved in formation from 1992 till 2012. In this context, I'll address factors that may have contributed to the occurrence of child abuse, as well as how they have affected the church's response.

1. Screening Procedures

Candidates for priesthood have always been examined prior to entry and throughout the years of formation. Since the 1980s, Banyo Seminary has *screened* all applicants, using an independent psychologist. Professionals speak of three categories of offender, *sadistic sociopaths*, *preferential offenders* and *situational offenders*. All three categories violate personal boundaries, *physically, emotionally and behaviourally*.

The psychologist's initial report to the Rector (available to the student) names the applicant's state of selfhood and areas to address. If other psychologist's reports are made of a seminarian, the seminarian cannot be obliged to share it with the Rector. Church Law and Privacy Legislation protect this right. During my time as Rector (1995-2000) one potential applicant was identified as sociopathic and was declined entry to the Seminary. There were annually around 25 students in the Seminary program during my six years as Rector.

The **Selection** process at Banyo involved:

- A *Vocations Director* in each Queensland Diocese who met regularly with potential students. For the last six years, Brisbane has hosted a House of

Discernment where potential applicants live, study and pray for a year, while going about their study or work. Initial screening occurs here.

- The *Bishop* who met the applicant several times before sponsoring him in the Seminary program.
- The *Rector* who meets several times with potential applicants, discussing motivation, family history, what he sees as the life-tasks he needs to address, any troubles with the law, as well as the discipline of celibacy. After receiving letters of support from the applicant's parish priest, arrangements are made for psych testing.

Brisbane Archdiocese has an Admissions Panel to advise the Archbishop on the suitability of applicants. The other dioceses would have some screening process.

2. What is Formation?

Pope John Paul II, in 1995, named four formative planks for a Seminary formation program: the human, spiritual, academic and pastoral domains. He names formation dispositions essential for being a priest: "In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it's important that the priest should mould his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ. The priest should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to meeting and making dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments. Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities; to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This demands that the priest is not arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable,

sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discrete, generous and ready to serve.”¹ Formation staff work with students to develop these human qualities throughout the seven years of the program.

The *Academic* program has been well catered for from the beginning of the Seminary in 1941. Most faculty now hold advanced degrees from European and North American Universities. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s staff held higher degrees from Roman universities and taught out of Latin text-books. The late 60s was marked by great ferment, within and beyond the church. The task of learning was shifting from replication of facts in exams to constructing knowledge by interpreting lived human experience in the light of theology and the social sciences. Pope Francis has said: “The deposit of the faith is one thing....the way it is expressed is another. Let us never forget that the expression of truth can take different forms.”² Several lecturers demonstrated flexibility in their teaching strategies, using case studies and research projects.

Spiritual Directors give weekly conferences on Catholic spirituality and meet one-on-one with students, monthly. Until Pope John Paul II named *human formation* as the basic building block, there was little talk at Banyo of human sexuality. Child abuse was not spoken about. There was talk about Particular Friendships and a rule against going into another student’s room. The concern underpinning this rule wasn’t explained at the time. Now, throughout their Seminary program, students undertake a comprehensive course on Sexuality and Celibacy.

The *Pastoral* dimension was, for decades, left to “osmosis”, assuming that new priests would “pick up” pastoral practice in their parish appointments. Just as there are few, if any, born-parents, there are few born-pastors. Parents have parenthood drawn out of them by their children. So do priests by their

¹ Pope John Paul II (1992) *Pastores Dabo Vobis* #43

² Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium* #45

parishioners. Yet, with Vatican Two came the recognition that the once null curriculum needed to become the explicit curriculum. “Priests cannot be ministers of Christ unless they are witnesses and dispensers of a life other than this earthly one. But they cannot be of service if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of men (and women)”³ Consequently, in the early 1970s, Fr Kevin Caldwell and Sr Ann Amen of the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau equipped students with basic counselling skills. A decade later, Fr Dan Grundy and Mrs Pat Hall developed an experiential learning approach through a course known to generations of students as *Communication and Processes Within Groups*, or simply as *Group*. Since the mid 1990s students have explored Power and Authority as well as Culture.

3. 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.⁴

While there is no direct link between celibacy and child abuse, celibacy may be linked to clericalism and a **clerical culture** which has played a part in abuse. When a priest settles for ordination as his deepest identity, when he sees priesthood as a state to be entered, rather than as a life to be lived for others, he is skating on thin ice. 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. Clericalism engenders a false sense of entitlement. Robert McClory⁵ describes it as

³ *Presbyterorum Ordinis* #3

⁴ 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.

⁵ Robert McClory, “The New Pope’s Real Target: Clericalism” in *National Catholic Reporter* April 4, 2013

becoming “members of a boys club that is warm, supportive and exclusive – and never breaks ranks. Some priest’s 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.”⁶ 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 arise can indicate the presence of clericalism.

How we **name ourselves** shapes our understanding of and our relationship to power or rather to our way of exercising authority. This suggests to me that how priests have named themselves has contributed, unsuspectingly, to developing intoxicating clericalism. 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. Connected to this understanding is the belief that it is always possible to turn one’s life around. This may not be a possibility for sociopaths or preferential offenders without external constraints. The fact that situational offenders are usually one time offenders suggests that this category of offender may not repeat the offense. When child abuse is understood primarily as a moral lapse, the focus is on the offender, rather than on the victim. The church has been too trusting, too optimistic that the programs for the rehabilitation of priest-offenders would ‘work’.

⁶ George Wilson (2008) *Clericalism* Collegeville: Liturgical Press p7

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.

4. 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'⁷
- 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

5. 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:

⁷ James Poling (1991) *The Abuse of Power* Nashville: Abingdon Press p94

- 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

6. Conclusion

In light of the evidence given to the Royal Commission:

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."⁸
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.

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* #30-31