

Tommy Campion and Phillip Aspinall - the road to redemption

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IN AN INCREDIBLE SPECIAL REPORT, ABUSE SURVIVOR TOMMY CAMPION REVEALS HIS STRUGGLE FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FOR THE ANGLICAN CHURCH, WHILE THE CHURCH'S HEAD PHILLIP ASPINALL REVEALS HIS EFFORTS TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE HIS CHURCH HAS CAUSED.

By Tommy Campion

DEAR members of the royal commission,

I would think seriously about donating a kidney if I am given the opportunity to stand before the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse. And after eight years of battling the Anglican Church for answers, something exciting has happened concerning the sexual and physical abuse of more than 200 children.

Yes, to hell with the kidney, it means nothing compared to the horrific and violent abuse children suffered at the hands of Anglican clergy and staff over the five decades the Church of England North Coast Children's Home was functioning.

I was raised in that Anglican home for 14 years, 10 of which were brutal. I was sexually violated and physically abused. To this day I bear the scars on my back from a flogging.

The scars in my mind are deeper.

I have battled the Anglican Church's Bishop Keith Slater for nearly eight years to find out who had the responsibility to care for and protect the children, and who had the duty of care. Very simple.

I have written countless letters to archbishops, bishops, clergy and church workers wanting answers but they bunkered down behind the pulpit and ambushed me with Bibles and bullshit, refusing to reply to my questions. Slater made a flurry of attempts to distance himself by saying the Church was far removed from the home.

At one stage I wrote a letter to Slater every week for nearly a year pleading with him to meet me and talk of the abuse and who had the responsibility to care for and protect the children. Slater did not reply.

So I wrote to the leader of the Anglican Church of Australia, Primate Archbishop Dr Phillip Aspinall. For five years I begged him to meet me, to speak of the abuse of 200 children. He refused.

Letters from his office read: "The Primate does not consider there would be any useful purpose gained by such a meeting."

In the past the Anglican Church had a name that could be trusted, a name the public could rely on.

As the years passed, terrified victims cautiously came forward telling horrific stories of sexual violence and physical abuse.

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But instead of reaching out to those victims, the Church closed its hearts and locked its doors.

The good name of the Church began to fade. It went about its methods in dark and mysterious ways. When the victims pleaded with the Church to listen, to speak with them, there was often silence.

If the Anglican Church continues to disregard the truth of abuse, if it refuses to act promptly and help the victims who may come forward with written complaints, if it fails to follow its own code of ethics, the future of the Church will be doomed and lives of victims will be traumatised forever.

Desperate to have my voice heard, in February last year on a stinking hot day in Brisbane, lathered in sweat and dripping with fear, I began my one-man protest on busy Ann St outside Aspinall's office.

I awkwardly clutched a sign. My words were powerful: "Anglican Church Child Abuse Cover-up."

In 2005 when Aspinall was made primate he became the leader of three million Anglicans in Australia. He was hailed as a "champion of the rights of people abused in Anglican institutions".

My protest was successful.

A miracle.

During an hour-long meeting with the Archbishop in his spacious office, he looked into my eyes and said: "Tommy, I promise I will try to get to the bottom of this."

At the second meeting with the Archbishop in May last year, after he had read my information proving the Anglican Church played a key role in the running of the home, he said: "There is no doubt in my mind because of that involvement the Church had responsibility to protect and care for children in the home and to ensure they were not subjected to cruelty or abuse."

On August 14, I sat opposite Slater, the person who had ignored me for many years. Beside him was a Sydney barrister. Neither allowed me to have a lawyer present, nor was I allowed to tape the meeting for reference.

After a bunch of words from the barrister about who could have had the duty of care of the home, Slater calmly admitted: "The Anglican Church had the moral responsibility to care and protect the children."

Bingo! An admission of guilt. A triumph. A wonderful moment.

But why did it take Aspinall and Slater eight years to answer my questions?

Based on government documentation, evidence from former Department of Community Services manager Tony Madden and my sheer determination, the archbishop and bishop really had no choice but to admit the Church had the responsibility, and moral responsibility, to care for the children.

But the heartbreaking fact is the Anglican clergy neglected to protect the innocent children.

Various clergy sexually and physically abused the children, and the clergy turned a blind eye to the abuse.

Royal commissioners, I have only skimmed the surface on this issue, so I hope you will speak with me in some capacity.

I have much more to say.

Kind regards,

Richard "Tommy" Campion.

Tommy Campion gave permission for Archbishop Phillip Aspinall to respond on behalf of the Church below. Having read that response, he says he stands by his version of events. This week the commission invited him to give evidence.

By Phillip Aspinall

Before I go on to write about the terrible case of Tommy Campion, I want to say this to him: Tommy, you should not have suffered what you did suffer in the Church of England North Coast Children's Home.

It was horrific.

The Church had responsibilities to protect and care for you and other children. I am deeply sorry that you suffered then, and still suffer now, and I again apologise to you.

These were also the words I said to Tommy Campion in May last year. It's true I didn't meet Tommy until last year, but I didn't ignore him. In fact, more than 60 times from 2007 to 2013, I or my staff responded to Tommy. At least 22 times I contacted Grafton Diocese on Tommy's behalf and offered help. I briefed Tommy over 20 times. My abuse response director met or contacted Tommy on at least 39 other occasions.

These actions haven't reassured Tommy - and for someone who's been through what he has that's probably understandable - but they were sincere and honest.

From the beginning I've been upfront about the primate's role. Tommy has been betrayed. I wasn't going to compound that by letting him believe I could do what I couldn't. The fact is, as primate, I've no pope-like powers to tell Grafton's bishop what to do. Grafton alone had the information, documents, power and authority to address Tommy's questions and claims. The primate can advise, but can't force another diocese to act. This is confirmed by Anglican law expert Paul de Jersey, Queensland's chief justice.

I have never used these limits as an excuse.

In May 2007, Tommy raised a new allegation of historic gang rape in a letter to me. I reported this to police, prompting an investigation.

I repeatedly urged Grafton's bishop to hear Tommy's pleas and reach a speedy resolution. I suggested Grafton acknowledge its involvement with the home and give Tommy the home's constitutions. When Tommy said Grafton's financial settlement was unjust, I suggested the bishop make an appropriate offer. When Tommy said the settlement deed might stop him holding the Church responsible, I suggested the bishop revise it. When Tommy said Grafton had withdrawn counselling funding, I urged its reinstatement.

In 2006, before Tommy contacted me, I'd advised Grafton too. And shared my advice with lawyers representing Tommy and 40 others.

I first read Tommy's story in a letter he'd sent to someone else. Like many reading his piece today, I felt - as a father - sickened. As an Anglican, ashamed. As a human, angry that any child should suffer like this. I wrote immediately to Tommy, expressing my sorrow.

I also acted. In March last year I arranged for Grafton to meet Tommy and answer his duty of care question. Tommy refused. I then arranged for a former appeal court judge to facilitate an answer. Grafton refused. A meeting eventually happened, resolving little. This month I received a written report from a Grafton employee alleging serious breaches of church law and pastoral failures, most unrelated to Tommy. I raised these with Bishop Keith Slater, head of the Grafton Diocese, and said if there were substantial truth in the report, he needed to consider his position. I referred the report to the royal commission. Last week Slater resigned.

Before this report, what I knew of Grafton's response was limited to Grafton's legal commitments, conflicting claims and counter-claims, my interactions and public record facts. Media reports showed a priest-abuser was jailed in 2002 and allegations against other clergy later went to police. I knew 38 survivors had settled in 2007, that Tommy and his lawyer settled in 2010 and professional counselling was provided (Tommy publicly estimated \$10,000).

Some of Tommy's claims were inaccurate. Last year, for example, clearly distressed, Tommy publicly said I'd ignored him for 50 days. But in that time my staff's contacts with Tommy included 21 emails, 10 telephone calls and five meetings. I know many think the Church's responses to sexual abuse have not changed. Sadly, in some places and cases, there are serious failings still.

My diocese began reforms in 2002. All priests have a government child safety card. Mandatory reporting is policy. Police guide our response. We don't silence victims in return for payouts. We seek out victims. Some 200 files on historic abuse matters have been opened since 2002.

Of course it's imperfect. I'm sure there've been human errors we don't know about, too.

But it's important for survivors to know their great suffering is driving change and building safer futures.

The Church's obligations don't stop with financial and legal settlements. We've spiritual and pastoral responsibilities to victims yet to come forward, to non-Church victims we help through counselling, health, welfare and education services, and to the hundreds of thousands of Anglican abuse survivors who find church a source of comfort.

How to assist those who are inconsolable, and how to respond when trust is completely gone, is a continuing challenge. I welcome the royal commission's involvement. Hopefully this gives Tommy, other victims and our Church a fearless and independent review.

I also hope it brings Tommy the peace my efforts didn't.

Dr Phillip Aspinall is Archbishop of Brisbane and Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia.

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