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Herald Sun
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An end to silence

THERE is no adequate way to repair the damage done by pedophile priests who have betrayed the trust of the church and their parishioners, but at least apologies represent a step in the right direction.

As we report today, the parish moderator of the Catholic Church in Mildura has taken such a step.

He has apologised and sought the forgiveness of the community over incidents of sexual abuse involving a priest who served in Mildura between 1957 and 1971.

There appears to have been a conspiracy of silence at that time — church leaders, senior police and other community figures may have closed ranks to protect the priest from prosecution and the church from embarrassment. Misguided cover-ups were common back then.

They were wrong. They permitted molesters to evade punishment and to continue committing unspeakable crimes against children. They left the victims in a morale-sapping void between guilt and confusion.

But signs that the church has learned bitter lessons from recent revelations are evident in humble apologies such as that issued in Mildura. Acknowledgments of wrongdoing build on the promise by Archbishop George Pell that the truth will be told, no matter how much it hurts, and that allegations will be investigated, no matter where they lead.

To many children victimised in the past, these steps may seem too little too late. But they are important in that they are a commitment to the future wellbeing of individuals and church communities by the leader of Victoria's Catholics, who has pledged his support for victims and put transgressors on notice.

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