Dear Commissioners,

Re Our Earlier Submission for Issues Paper 11 titled [REDACTED]

Yesterday in The Australian newspaper I read an article titled “Catholic Row over Probe into Confession” which stated that the Royal Commission intends to examine the Sacrament of Confession in regards to child abuse. In our earlier submission we discuss confession under the heading ‘Sinful Confession’ on about page 33. We would like to add what I believe is important information which I did not know at the time of writing of the submission. I ask your consideration to include below what I see as a vital example relevant to the issue of confession.

To be inserted after the tenth paragraph under the ‘Sinful Confession’ heading:

Contrary to the hierarchy’s impression that a priest is bound to forgive a pennant (sinner) coming to them is an example of a priest refusing to forgive in the confessional. In her book ‘To Prey and To Silence’, published August this year, 2016, Joan Isaacs describes the following incident when she was a child in the early 1960’s:

Although I was about seven years old at the time, I can still remember the trauma of this day... The three of us waited for our parents at the back of the church. My father went into the confessional and my mother was on the other side. Dad was first to have his confession heard. I remember hearing raised voices and I was unsure of what was happening other than that the angry sound was coming from the priest in the confessional. Suddenly my father burst forth from the confessional and went to the other side to get my mother. The priest also emerged and was yelling at both of them. He continued to pursue them out of the church, all the while screaming at them. We had no idea what had happened. It was a frightening experience and all we knew was that we could not go back to church.

Much later I found out the reason behind this horrific scene that was etched in my memory. My father was refused absolution by the priest because the priest wanted him to promise never to use contraception again.
It had been for medical reasons and her doctor’s advice that Joan Isaacs’s mother was in this situation.

I find the above passage from Joan’s book significant as it is the only example of a priest refusing to forgive sin in the confessional that I have come across – again this is something we would not normally hear.

This example of absolution refusal shows that it is possible for a priest, on hearing the sin in the confessional, to refuse to forgive that sin. An even more recent example is found in The Australian newspaper on 3-4 December 2016 in an article titled ‘Breaking the Seal of the Confessional A Red Herring that Will Not Save One Child’ by Fr Frank Brennan. Fr Brennan stated:

“If they [the sinner] were unwilling to do so [i.e., seek help re sexually assaulting children], I would deny absolution.”

So we now have two examples of priests having the veto to refuse absolution; one in the early 1960s and the other in December 2016. Given we now have the knowledge that this priestly veto existed between those 55 years, the question must be asked – why did the 30 Queensland priests in the McArdle case, between 1978 and 2003, all give absolution for this heinous crime against children for 25 years over 1,500 confessions when they had the veto to refuse absolution and could have brought a stop to the criminal behavior of a child molester who had to confess his crimes on a weekly basis? Again were priests obliged to forgive another priest this crime through teachings at the seminary? Seminary teachings should now be that absolution not be given to any person, priest or otherwise, for this crime until they have handed themselves into the Police.

Again the priesthood makes up its own rules for its confession so they can change the rules with the help of the government enforcing such changes via the Royal Commission’s recommendations.

In the McArdle case - and other cases where priests believe their sexual assaults on children are a sin – refusing absolution would have forced those priests into not taking communion at mass – an impossible situation for a priest conducting weekly mass. If all priests refused absolution for their fellow child sex offender priests then it would have caused drastic action to be taken by the offending priest - such as immediately removing himself from ministry by taking administrative leave until he solved his problem or by resigning.

It is important to have this knowledge of the individual priest’s veto of absolution refusal when confronting the Catholic Church hierarchy over the issue of Confession and Absolution of Sin.

This example of the priesthood’s behavior; that they cannot forgive and therefore damn a woman for using contraception for health reasons but then can forgive the crimes of a repeat child molester weekly for 25 years without question or attempting to stop it is an utter inhumane disgrace to women and children which the priesthood should be completely ashamed of, but which I am sure, they would not care at all about and would, today, still officially uphold those same ethics and the outcomes those ethics create.

That is the end of the addition to my submission.

Kindest regards,
Chrissie and Anthony Foster