



**Factors that may have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions, particularly by clergy and religious.**

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*I presume that the Royal Commission has already had people look at the training of Catholic Brothers. I do not expect any feedback from this. I submit it in case it adds to the picture you have of possible reasons for sex abuse of boys being an issue in some Catholic boys' schools.*

I joined the Christian Brothers as a fifteen year old in 1960. I was a novice at Minto NSW in 1961 and made first vows as a brother when I was seventeen early in 1962.

The aim of the novitiate was to socialise us into the Brothers' way of life. It was intense. We did not ask questions. Until two years before us the novice master was Brother [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] He humiliated young men as part of his socialisation of them. Our novice master Brother [REDACTED] did not but there was no attempt at all to help us discover our needs, or any problems we had and there was no attempt whatever to help us solve them. I think the brothers then were unaware of the issues we might have.

The whole aim was to form us into what they regarded as 'good brothers'. I believe that often what were held up as virtues were in fact neuroses. The anxious were encouraged to be more anxious. The compulsive helpers were encouraged in their compulsions. Controllers were enabled to control even more. We were also encouraged to inform on each other about trivial mistakes and divergences from the rules. There was not an atmosphere of trust.

The temporary vows I made in 1962 were only for one year but the novice master told us to decide in our hearts that it was for life. When I eventually made final vows at Christmas 1969 I tried to really choose celibacy but I realise now that I could not even imagine not being a brother by then. My making of final vows was not a real adult choice because I did not have an alternative.

From the moment I entered as a fifteen year old we were heavily socialised into the word and the idea 'perseverance'. When I was a novice I was Brother Anthony. Our novice master told me, "When you die if it is Brother Anthony in the coffin you will have been a success. If

it is Graham English you will have been a failure." It was not a choice because I could not imagine a choice.

In the year we were novices we were almost entirely on silence. We spent a lot of time praying and doing physical work.

We spent hours and hours learning about obedience, "Keep the rule and the rule will keep you" and, "The will of your superior is God's Will in your regard."

From the moment we entered at fifteen we were forbidden from having a 'particular friend'. They were afraid of homosexuality I am sure but this was not explained. The effect of this fear of particular friends was that we were effectively forbidden from having any real friends. We had no teaching about intimacy or friendship, nor any encouragement to have real conversations with anyone. As I was a small immature boy when I entered I had never had a girlfriend nor really had a close friend of any kind. My mother who was deeply anxious was frightened of other children in my regard and discouraged me from having close friends.

We also had no access to the media, even Catholic media or to what was called 'secular reading', that is anything other than safe books on the saints, the brothers' life and so called 'spiritual reading'.

The novitiate was out in the country. There was a strong emphasis on people other than us being 'seculars'. We were being trained to lead a life of perfection by being isolated from any other choices.

All we were told about sex was that every thought, word and deed pertaining to sex was a mortal sin. In those days we had been told over and over from kindergarten that if we committed a mortal sin and were not forgiven in confession and if we died like that we would go to hell for all eternity. Fear and anxiety were encouraged as strong motives for being 'good'.

In the novitiate we were given the clear idea that if we left the brothers we would be in great danger of losing our souls; that we would go to hell for all eternity. In the Catholic milieu of those times this felt like a very real possibility. People who left the Brothers were

never to be mentioned again 'even in letters'. They were called 'defectors' and were as if dead. In the training college we certainly didn't talk about those who left. They just disappeared.

Our novice master was not a misogynist as far as I know but women were sometimes referred to as 'pieces of fluff' by older brothers. They were not treated as equal humans. They were seen as a threat and so disparaged. I believe that Catholic sexual teaching then, especially the way it was applied to us was disturbed and deeply disturbing.

One of the affects of our training as brothers was that we were encouraged to become more neurotic rather than more healthy or open. Our novice master, a good man who had entered aged thirteen had spent his entire career up till then in the brothers working in the training colleges. He had no broader experience of life at all. His assistant had several hang ups about sex which harmed me and I suspect others. Some of the men chosen to be on the staff of the training colleges were most inappropriate.

I spent three years in close training with these men yet I came out of the training college knowing almost nothing about them even ordinary knowledge about their families. We were supposed to be 'dead to the world'. We were not allowed talk to each other about anything important. I have no close friends from that time. There is a Latin sentence, "*Noli me tangere*, touch me not!" that was quoted at us. It meant physical touching but it was against psychological touching as well. Intimacy was taboo.

I have since observed that many young people in my time entered religious life from dysfunctional homes, for example having one or two alcoholic parents, having a parent who was psychologically ill, having been sexually abused. No one seemed aware of this. And no one did anything to help us overcome or even address the dysfunctions. The theology that families that had a vocation, that is a child going off to be a priest, brother or nun was blessed by God, did not account for those for whom novitiates and seminaries were an escape from harm.

We began the novitiate in the middle of January 1961 and made first vows early in March 1962. All we were told about sex was DON'T. A week or so **after** we made our first vow of chastity/celebrity we had an ancient Jesuit come and spend a morning talking to us about

sexuality. This sounds bizarre, and it is, but his morning of lectures consisted of a talk on flowers. I remember a daffodil drawn on the blackboard to illustrate how flowers were procreated; one of the others in our group whom I raised this with says it was a daisy. He talked about pistils and stamens and pollen and before lunch he concluded with, "And brothers it is the same for you and me. I will be available in the confessional after lunch should anyone have any questions. "

We also spent many hours being trained in poverty. We had to ask permission for everything, toothpaste, soap, everything. This encouraged us to remain childlike about money and many other things.

There were thirty five boys and men who began the novitiate with me in 1961. Twenty nine finished that first year. Of that twenty nine five men that I know of have been in trouble over sexual abuse. At least one has served considerable time in prison. I have no idea how this compares with other groups in the Brothers. I feel some sympathy for most of these men. They are in some sense victims too.

Lest I sound totally critical of my training in the brothers I had excellent teacher training. The people in charge of our teacher training introduced me to poetry and other English literature; they taught me how to think and encouraged me to study. There were many things about what was then monastic life that I found growth producing and helpful. The two best decisions I've made in my life were to enter the brothers, then after seventeen years to leave. With wise counselling and wise formation I might have left considerably earlier. Many of the brothers were and are fine men.

But there <sup>as</sup> was too much pressure to find recruits who would fill places in schools even if they were unsuitable as brothers or as teachers. There was a truly disturbed attitude to sexuality and intimacy in the Church. Brothers, priests and to some extent nuns (there was considerable mysoginism in the Church) were considered a class above lay people. Priests were considered a class above everyone. And the Church was for various reasons insular. We grew up with the impression that the Protestant establishment and most of Australian society was against us. We had to defend ourselves against them and show them that we too were worthwhile. So violations of rules and anything else <sup>w</sup>ere kept in-house.

James McAuley wrote in his poem 'Because' in his collection of poems, *Surprises of the Sun*, "we were all caught in the same defeat." Too much of what was going on depended on what was almost a cultic way of being. And it was not based anywhere deeply enough on adult choices. People were sacrificed for the imagined Greater Good.

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Graham English

11<sup>th</sup> May 2016

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