
From: Jess Leach [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 30 June 2016 11:07 PM
To: Catholic
Subject: Submission - Issues Paper 11

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Royal Commission in regards to the Catholic Church.

I am a 31 year old Catholic, who has been involved with various missionary activities of the Church for the past seven and a half years, in Australia and also in Italy. I have worked particularly in youth ministry.

To preface my comments, I am horrified by the abuse that has been committed. I believe that anyone who seeks to hide a crime, such as a bishop hiding the crimes of a priest, should be prosecuted. I also believe that any priest found guilty of child sexual abuse should be laicised.

In regards to the issues you have invited submissions on, I will address those that I feel I have some experience in.

I do not believe that mandatory celibacy is the cause of sexual abuse of children by priests, and I find it a thoughtless and strange argument. By nature of my unmarried state, and in keeping with the teachings of the Church, I am also called to celibacy as long as I am single. This is not always easy - because the desire for love and marriage is naturally strong - but I do not find myself, or other single Catholics that I know, struggling to resist the temptation to sexually abuse children. Furthermore, we can see anecdotally that sexual abuse has taken place in institutions and organisations - such as schools, other Christian churches, the military - that do not have mandatory celibacy.

Celibacy for priests in the Western church has a significant theological underpinning, as the priest stands in the person of Christ, who gives his whole self in the service of the Church. While it is not a doctrinal matter, and could change in the future, I have had encounters with many priests and parishes through my work and I can see the great benefits to this current practice, including availability for the mission.

In regards to the Sacrament of Confession, I have personally experienced a great deal of healing and peace in this Sacrament. I have never, in nearly eight years of regularly partaking of the Sacrament of Confession, felt threatened or unsafe.

I cannot comment on how the culture of the Church contributed to sexual abuse in the past, as I have only witnessed the Church 'up close' for the last seven and a half years. In that time, however, I have seen that there is a great awareness of the need to protect children and the vulnerable and a desire to avoid the grave evil that is to cover up abuse.

I have also seen a Church that desires to put Christ, through prayer, at the centre. This desire is reflected in the words of the Popes of my generation - John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. I see this lived out in the many friends who have entered religious life or the diocesan seminary with a view to discerning a vocation to the consecrated life. I am personally part of a lay community which puts prayer at the centre of our daily lives. To pray is to be in relationship with Jesus, and it was Jesus who said, "Better put a millstone around your neck than lead one of these little ones astray." This is not to say that there are not hypocrites, or those who say one thing in prayer but obviously enact another in daily life, or even those who deliberately try to deceive in presenting a pious way of life that masks a sinful hidden life - but in my experience, and I have

encountered a large number of Catholic priests, religious and lay people, most of those who are committed to an active life in the Church desire to be saints (because sainthood, as Pope Francis said on 1st Nov, 2013, is for all - something John Paul II also showed by canonising more men and women in his pontificate than had been previously canonised by all preceding Popes).

I feel deep remorse and regret for the crimes perpetrated by members of the Church - and I do not believe the Church needs to defend herself in regards to those crimes. Wrong was done and should be acknowledged and repented of. It is important to provide a perspective, however, on different aspects of the Church that may come into question as a result of this Commission and I'm grateful that this call for submissions has made that possible.

May God bless the work you do in protecting children and thank you for reading this contribution.

Jessica Leach

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