

Use and Misuse of Power in the Catholic Church

A Personal Reflection

Alex Nelson

I am writing from the standpoint of a Catholic, now in my seventies, who regards himself as a critical friend of the Catholic Church. I am hoping that, following the invitation of Pope Francis I, Church leaders and Catholics worldwide will make choices for transformation into the kind of community that I perceive in the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus.

Fifty years ago, Vatican Council II had stirred up such a hope in many Catholics. However, since the 1970s, I have seen a weakening of the resolution to be 'open to the signs of the times'. Instead, Church authorities have mostly continued to prefer Tradition as the major source of practical wisdom to guide the life of Catholics. I realise with grief and anger that the Church's leadership generally does not trust what the Church of the people has learned from conscientious consideration of their life experience. In particular, many leaders in the Catholic Church continue to resist the wisdom of lay Catholics, whose understanding of sexuality and gender, human relationships and marriage has been gained in good faith from their lived experience.

I was ordained priest in 1963 for work in the Archdiocese of Sydney. In the early 1970s, through my experience of life and work as a priest, I became aware of my deep desire to be a partner in marriage and a parent. This conviction emerged like a second call alongside and not instead of my initial sense of call and desire to be a priest. I soon discovered that my experience of being drawn to both priesthood and marriage had occurred worldwide in the lives of thousands of other Catholic priests. Requests for a change to the regulation for mandatory celibacy for Catholic priests were denied by Church authorities¹.

¹ Theological reflection to reach a decision about changes in pastoral policies and procedures engages the Tradition of a faith community into dialogue with some emerging experience in that faith community that poses a challenge to it or presents some promise of fruitfulness. From this engagement, a new majority practice may be developed. Recent conclusions from the Bishops' Meetings on Family and Marriage have pointed Bishops towards finding ways to enable intercommunion for married couples, and to admit remarried Catholics to receiving the Eucharist – issues that concern many Catholics.

Women and men who commit themselves to a religious life style in Catholicism embrace, through vows or solemn promise, the basic values and virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience. Some religious orders include additional vows or promises such as loyalty to the Pope, or committed service to people who are poor, sick and dying. A great deal of attention in the communications media and in social media focuses on the Catholic Church's requirement of celibacy as the major influence on the incidence of sexual abuse perpetrated in institutions by clergy and lay leaders. There is an assumption that because celibacy restrains the expression of their sexuality in marriage, priests are prone to engaging in paedophilia. I consider that the theology that underlies ecclesiastical power and the practice of hierarchical obedience is a more fundamental dynamic in the Church's present crisis of trust over the sexual abuse of children.

Celibacy

Since the late 1960s, in North America and Europe many priests who resigned from ministry had married, disappointed that Church regulations did not value their additional sense of call nor permit them to have a modified pastoral role in Catholic parishes and institutions. Priests and Associations of Priests throughout the Catholic Church had approached local and Vatican hierarchy, with requests for new arrangements to allow a married priesthood in the Western or Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, similar to what has already existed for centuries in its Eastern Rite. Requests from priests for a dispensation from celibacy in order to exercise a married priesthood were dismissed by the Vatican despite support from some Bishops in a number of countries. The exodus of priests from ministry continued. Many resigned from active ministry regretfully to embrace marriage joyfully. Not all priests who resigned during those years chose to marry, for a variety of reasons. With marriage in mind or not, the priests who resigned did not put their faith any longer in priesthood as clericalism. Nor did they trust Church authority that continued to put aside theological wisdom concerning sexuality and alternative models of leadership that were being proposed by lay people and clergy in those years.

Hope persisted among some priests and people that the Church in the late 1970s would change its regulations to allow optional celibacy for priests. The short lived reign of Pope John Paul I had raised hopes for a more compassionate

climate in the Church. Having waited hopefully through these years after Vatican Council II for a change in Church regulations for celibacy, I began to realise that with the election of Pope John Paul II there would be no such change.

In 1983, grateful for the Church's provision of a sabbatical from my work as a University chaplain, I began a year of reflection and consultation about my life's direction, with the accompaniment of a therapist and a spiritual director. As well, I took courses in Pastoral Theology and Spirituality at the Institute for Pastoral Studies in Chicago. In 1985, I returned to Sydney. In July 1986 I resigned from the priesthood and married in December that year. With disappointment at the loss of a life's work of priestliness that I still value², but with a great sense of joy and liberation, I had chosen to find in marriage a way that would have greater joy and integrity for me. I did not want to live till old age with a sense of deprivation and resentment that might drive me to seek compensation for my emptiness at the expense of other people, or to seek comfort in alcohol or unremitting work.

My work since 1987 followed a way into adult education, counselling and spiritual formation. From 1987-1995, I joined with my wife and two other women theological educators to form the Pastoral Theology Team at United Theological College, North Parramatta. During those years, our ecumenical team made an innovative contribution to the formation of Uniting Church ministers. In particular, we introduced Reflective Practice³ and Transformative Learning into their personal and ministerial formation.

Our son was born in 1988 and our daughter in 1992. I completed a PhD in Adult Learning part-time at the University of Technology, Sydney. For this research, I engaged with a small group of former Catholic priests who also had recently

² I agree with John O'Donohue (1995: 43-53) who made a distinction between priestliness – "an implicit characteristic of every woman and man..." and "Explicit priesthood which is a ministry conferred by the institutional Church ..." (47). After my resignation, I was able to return to express in my life a priestliness that has its roots in my personal and communal identity.

³ Donald Schon's (1983) approach to the education of professionals as Reflective Practitioners drew upon previous reflective learning theories and practices. Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory and research during the 1980s had an important influence on my postgraduate research and on my subsequent practice as adult educator. Whereas these approaches to reflective learning and transformative learning emphasised critical reasoning, my research included imagination as another significant factor.

resigned from ministry and married. Using collaborative research processes we explored the transformative learning that had led to our decisions to leave the priesthood.

During 1996-1997, I taught in the Faculty of Adult Education at UTS. In the following year, I served as Director of Mission at St Vincent's Private Hospital, Darlinghurst. During 1999-2000, I worked as Pastoral Animator for Holy Family Catholic Community in Mount Druitt. From 2000-2006, I was employed by The Mercy Foundation as an adult educator, collaborating in the Urban Ministry Movement's Clinical Pastoral Education courses⁴. During that time, I began to provide pastoral supervision for lay and ordained ministers from a variety of religious denominations. Some were engaged in hospital, welfare, prison and educational chaplaincies; the ministry of others was based in a parish or congregation. Since 2007, when some colleagues and I formed Transforming Practices Inc., an association of pastoral supervisors and trainers, I have continued my practice of pastoral supervision. During that decade, I was employed also for brief periods as a Lecturer to provide courses and academic supervision in Pastoral / Practical Theology at Australian Catholic University, Sydney College of Divinity, and Broken Bay Institute.

I am writing in the social and cultural context of Prime Minister Julia Gillard's decision in 2012 to call a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to the Sexual Abuse of Children in Australia. Clearly, considerable impetus for this inquiry came from the widely reported incidence of this cruelty that has spanned decades in institutions within the Catholic Church, other churches and organisations which are established to ensure the safety of children in their care.

My intention in writing this reflection as a critical friend is not to diminish but to enhance the life of the Catholic Church. As a Catholic, I accept the responsibility to leave myself open to reform by undertaking critical reflection on my life and work in the light of my faith. My purpose is to name and try to understand what appears to be a shocking loss of wholeness within the Church that has allowed

⁴ I was surprised, relieved and grateful to be accepted for employment by these Congregations of Religious Women, and by Fr Paul Hanna, parish priest at Mount Druitt. I was enabled by them to find a livelihood that expressed continuity with my previous work and ongoing learning.

clergy sexual abuse to continue over decades, even though Church leaders were aware of it and sought to develop protocols to prevent it and remedy its effects. I also want to invite the Catholic Church to remember with me the good news of God's grace to help us address the present reality honestly and imagine the reshaping of the Church with hope. There is a great deal of irrepressible goodness in the faith and practice of the Catholic Church, even with flawed leadership. I believe that "we, the people" can take this opportunity to change our ways and recover our integrity.

Clericalism's response to victims of sexual abuse

I have a conviction that the crimes enacted by Catholic clergy and lay leaders included both acts of sexual abuse towards children and adults in institutions and the violence⁵ inherent in inept and obstructive responses by clerical authorities to complaints from victims. These two kinds of abuse are outcomes of distortions in the theory and practice of ecclesiastical power. Clericalism, based in hierarchy⁶ and patriarchy, leads to privileged status for the clergy and disempowers the laity. Those who were physically and sexually abused as children suffered a second abuse through Church responses to their complaints.

There is an ongoing mixture of collaboration and resistance from leaders in the Catholic Church worldwide to Pope Francis' call for a change of heart to replace privilege and power over others with sharing with them the mercy of God for all. I believe that there is still reluctance by Church leaders to express publicly their genuine sorrow for their failure to safeguard vulnerable children, women and men who were in the Church's care.

⁵ Violence is any physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural, or spiritual behaviour, attitude, policy, or condition that diminishes, dominates, or destroys ourselves or others. (Laura Slattery, Veronica Pelicarić, Ken Preston-Pile. *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*. Pace e Bene Press, 2005: 33).

⁶ Hierarchy asserts that those people in society who have special powers or sacred dignity are superior to those who do not. They are not accountable in the same way as other citizens are. Those who are inferior are expected to show respect and obedience to their superiors. Clergy gain their special status and sacred powers through Ordination. Royalty and heads of state belong to this privileged class.

The need for Church leaders to make a public apology

It is true that some Catholic Church leaders in Australia have indeed declared their sorrow that children in institutions and adults in the Church's care have endured violence of various kinds at the hands of both lay and clergy. Although these expressions of sorrow are genuine, they generally appear to me to amount only to offer condolences to those who have experienced abuse, and to others whose lives are affected by the abuse⁷.

Church statements also claim that perpetrators of abuse are "a few bad apples" among the vast majority of those who hold positions of trust. It is surely true that most clergy and laity who provide pastoral care, education, and healthcare and welfare services do so without sexual exploitation and cruelty. It is also understandable that most clergy are troubled by the revelations of abuse given in evidence to the Royal Commission, and made public through the media of communication. They are shamed and threatened by the loss of esteem for priests, in particular among Catholics, as well as in the general community. Bishops are keen to reassure their clergy that their leaders have confidence in them. They also want to reassure Catholics that, although abusive behaviour by priests and others has occurred and in some cases has been allowed by Church leaders to continue, those in positions of leadership are worthy of trust.

Although the offering of condolences and the expression of contrition may both use the word "Sorry" the two communications are not equivalent. Those who offer condolences express sympathy and sadness that victims have suffered harm. Those who express contrition, *mea culpa*, admit to themselves and to the victim the degree to which they are responsible by action or inaction for adding to the victim's hurt.

What is usually missing from statements by Church leaders about clergy abuse is this explicit contrition from the leader, a sincere *mea culpa* that admits responsibility in public for failing to prevent violence from recurring once it had

⁷ In their evidence to the Royal Commission, some Bishops and leaders have shown sorrow and admitted their failure to deal effectively with situations in which knowledge of sexual abuse had come to them.

become known. Instead of contrition, what often is expressed in addressing clergy abuse is a matter of face-saving; spin, making excuses, and discrediting victims. Regrettably, Church leaders often sound just like the leaders of other public institutions and government instrumentalities - such as police, defence, health, welfare, education, and those responsible for ensuring fair treatment to refugees - in their responses to criticism and being held to account⁸.

The Catholic Church's concern to avoid shame and media exposure and to engage in damage control by expediting payments for damages in order to silence those who are victims appears to have been a preferred response in a Church which claims to be *semper reformanda*, always open and attentive to ways to respond with integrity.

Some theologians and psychologists make a distinction between the motivation of superego and that of conscience in responding to the evil we do and in our declaration of sorrow and regret. Superego as a dynamic in moral maturing may be understood as what motivates individuals and organisations to avoid being "caught out" and seen as imperfect, to cover up in order to escape the shame of not meeting the expectations of a punitive parent-like authority and to escape punishment and rejection. On the other hand, for the sake of living with integrity and in just relationship with others, conscience motivates individuals and organisations to welcome with humility a disorienting accusation that their attitudes and other behaviours are destroying the dignity of others.⁹ Whereas the stance of superego is defensive and self-protective for one's own benefit, the stance of mature conscience leads to honest admission that we made choices destructive for others and for our own integrity. Conscience fosters growth in empathy through awareness that some of our choices bring abusive consequences for others; conscience reaches creatively for adequate ways to restore those whom we have harmed, and amend our behaviour.

⁸ It is noticeable that while Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently expressed sorrow for those who were killed at Pearl Harbour on 7 December, 1941, he made no apology for the attack by Japanese forces. Similarly, President Barack Obama mourned those who died in the atomic bomb attacks at Hiroshima, but made no apology.

⁹ John W. Glaser, S.J., "Conscience and Superego: A Key Distinction," *Theological Studies*, 32 (1971), 30-47

Like other Christian churches, the Catholic Church teaches, as a firm part of its faith and religious practice that through heartfelt repentance anyone who transgresses can find divine forgiveness and begin again on their way to integrity. Catholics have the Sacrament of Reconciliation, sometimes called Confession, as their place to ritualise their sorrow for having chosen, in whatever degree, to prefer knowingly evil above good.

The same requirements of genuine contrition apply for every member of the Catholic Church who makes a sincere confession. Penitents resolve to amend their lives by avoiding harmful behaviour in future and to repair what they can of the damage that their action or inaction has brought about. The Church teaches also that the priest who hears the confession of sin and sorrow will never disclose what the penitent has said.

Church leaders who recognise their failure in leadership will surely have already expressed in private Confession their contrition for faults of commission or neglect in dealing with sexual abuse by clergy and lay persons under their authority. But, now, something more than their private repentance is required of the leaders to restore the confidence of Catholics, and to regain esteem for the Catholic Church in the eyes of the general community. To address the limitations in the Catholic Church's culture and practice in response to sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy and lay, Church leaders now have an opportunity to bring about healing and confidence within the Church by publicly confessing their own lack of integrity, expressing their genuine sorrow, and professing clearly their plans to initiate and pursue reform.

It is likely that some leaders will say that the Church has already sorted out these matters, and that everything is in hand through the development of appropriate pastoral and administrative processes to deal with complaints of abuse, care for victims and restraint and discipline for perpetrators.

Unfortunately, for the Catholic Church, many Catholics do not have confidence in its proposals for reform and would prefer to see public actions that set the situation right, address the needs of the abused and help the Church get its integrity back.

Government leaders make apologies to heal the wounds of cruelty

The recent example of two apologies by Government leaders serves to illustrate how Church leaders might have expressed publicly their energy to reform the Church's life.

On 25 October 2012, Hon Ted Baillieu, Premier of the State Government of Victoria, expressed the Government's apology to those whose lives have been ill affected by previous regulations and practices governing adoption that involved the forced separation of mothers from their newborns.¹⁰

"Premier Baillieu acknowledged that the practice of forced adoptions occurred from early last century into the early 1980's but was particularly institutionalised between 1950 and 1975.

"Young mothers were routinely compelled, coerced, and given no realistic choice other than to relinquish their babies for adoption"

"On behalf of the Victorian Government, representing all of the Governments which have come before us, we express our sincere sorrow and regret for the health and welfare policies that condoned the practice of forced separations. These were misguided, unwarranted, and they caused immeasurable pain".

"We have undertaken to never forget what happened and to never repeat these practices," Mr Baillieu said.

The Victorian Government announced a number of additional measures to better respond to the needs of people who were affected by forced adoption practices.

In Canberra, on 21 March 2013, Prime Minister Julia Gillard delivered a national apology to victims of forced adoption practices that were in place in Australia from the late 1950s to the 1970s.¹¹

¹⁰ Parliament apologises for past adoption practices, Premier Media Release, Thursday, 25 October 2012.

¹¹ National Apology to Mothers and Victims of Adoption Policies, Thursday, 21 March, 2013. ABC News.

"Today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering."

"Most common of all was the bullying arrogance of a society that presumed to know what was best."

"The hurt did not simply last for a few days or weeks. This was a wound that would not heal."

The Prime Minister also acknowledged that children had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of their adoptive parents or institutions for care.

She announced \$5 million funding to improve access to specialist support, records tracing and mental health care for those affected by forced adoption, and a further \$1.5 million to the National Archives for a special exhibition.

Why do leaders throughout the Catholic Church still resist admitting their part in what has gone wrong in dealing with sexual abuse. What is it that holds back Catholics, within the hierarchy at all levels, and also among the laity, from speaking up and challenging behaviour and processes that are patently unjust?

Why is the suffering of the abused and those who have been affected by abuse still ignored, doubted, and minimised in order to protect the good name of the Church, thereby allowing those who have perpetrated violence or covered it up to continue in positions of influence and privilege?

Julia Gillard's words resonate with the behaviour of some leaders in the Catholic Church towards victims of sexual abuse. "*Most common of all was the bullying arrogance of a society that presumed to know what was best.*" The Church's ongoing discounting of the lived experience of Catholics continues to abuse them through its distorted theology of power (hierarchy) and sexuality and gender (patriarchy).

People in Australian society are not surprised any more by what some leaders in the Catholic Church and other institutions say in their defence. Some assert that talking about these matters is a waste of time because they do not expect any change. They continue to be disgusted to discover that "save the organisation at

all costs” is a slogan that religious communities, dioceses and church organisations share with the military, police, educational, sporting, health, banks and business organisations which also proclaim an ethic of care for their members, as well as for their “customers”. How did our Church get into this situation?

Clericalism

Because the culture of clericalism in the Catholic Church is based on patriarchy and hierarchy, it enables clergy and lay people in authority the privilege and power to go virtually unaccountable. Claiming a Divine warrant for its decisions, the Church allows a number of unjust practices to exist¹².

The question has emerged, “Are abusive practices by clergy paedophiles¹³ outcomes of the misuse of power by privileged members of the hierarchy, or are they due to distortions of personality in those clergy that are outcomes of restrictions imposed by compulsory celibacy¹⁴?”

¹² These unjust practices include the exclusion of women from ordained ministry. If the priesthood of women were allowed as a replica of male priesthood, it would dismantle patriarchy’s monopoly of priesthood, but it would not challenge hierarchy’s hold on ecclesiastical power.

¹³ Paedophilia has continued till now to occur under cover and unremarked. Sometimes a man will appear to be an ideal priest because he devotes time, energy and finance to children, many of whom are without a caring father’s presence in their life. When victims of abuse complain, they are often subject to shaming and disapproval from those who can see no harm in the priest. As well, paedophile clergy are likely to show no evidence of a relationship with a woman that would contravene the requirements for celibate life. Some paedophile clergy would claim that they, unlike priests who had chosen to marry, had at least maintained their celibate state even though they sexually abused children. It would appear to some clergy and Catholic laity that the greatest danger to a priest’s celibacy is a mature mutual friendship with a woman. It might lead to marriage and the Church’s “loss” of a priest.

¹⁴ In a letter to the Tablet (Letters 26 November, 2016), Terry Wright argues as follows. “Celibacy may have “absolutely nothing to do with paedophilia”, as Fr Clemens claims (Letters, 5 November) but the links between celibacy and abuse are so obvious as not to be worth mentioning, were it not that the Bishops of England and Wales seem to be in denial of this. Even the Nolan Report has nothing to say on the issue. But the return of what has been repressed in substitute formations and neurotic symptoms is one of the elements of psychoanalytic theory that only the foolish can afford to ignore. The only causes for surprise is that even more of our priests are not neurotic, burnt out or abusive and that we have any candidates for the priesthood at all.”

Clergy sexual abuse is able to exist, firstly, because clergy have power over others¹⁵. The patriarchal and hierarchical culture of clericalism, in principle, requires Catholics to give obedience/compliance to directives from those males who are higher up in the Church organisation. Secondly, the affective and relational lives of priests are required to fit a one size container of celibacy, which is often understood as abstinence from human intimacy. Clericalism can be expected to persist until the principles that sustain it are changed. Those who welcome the benefits from it are unlikely to challenge the arrangements that clericalism makes.

Many clergy show a lack of ongoing critical reflection on their ministry that might lead them to undertake action that is needed to change what is unjust in the Church's life. I consider that this absence of inquiry has its roots in seminary training. Seminarians engage in theological learning from tradition that often discounts human experience. They learn answers. They learn not to question further and to keep their discontent to themselves. Through their experience of exposure to the human condition (including their own) in ministry, clergy are likely soon to discover questions and perspectives they have not encountered through their theological studies. Since Vatican II some clergy, including Bishops and some Cardinals, have shown notable courage by raising disorienting questions in assemblies of priests, in dialogue with Church authorities, and by writing articles for journals. Their discovery of distortions in theology and practice has led them to challenge the foundations of clericalism for the sake of their own integrity and the dignity of the faithful.

¹⁵ In the same issue of the Tablet, Nicholas Peter Harvey, presents another perspective. "Your editorial on sexual abuse ("A disaster in theory and in execution", 22 October) reads like a throwback to the days of my religious childhood, when we were taught to think of the Catholic Church as all-knowing and all-sufficient, with nothing to learn from outsiders or indeed from non-clerics. The irony is that it is exactly this mentality that facilitates abusive behaviour by clergy and makes it peculiarly difficult to address straightforwardly. The best that can be said for our much-vaunted safeguarding procedures is that they may prevent some abuse. The interiorised clericalism still so pervasive in our Church has had to learn to scapegoat abusers and those suspected of abuse in order to protect the system, while doing nothing of substance to change the underlying culture. One consequence is that those who have fallen foul of our procedures are bearing a disproportionate responsibility for our systemic failure."

Fathering and Seminary Formation

There is a contradiction in that young and some old men are appointed Fathers through Ordination without themselves having experienced fathering during their years of formation. I admit that with my compliance, seminary education and formation displaced the influence of my own father¹⁶. I was influenced by the priests / Fathers who participated in my formation and education in good faith, obediently following the directions given to them. At the time and for years afterwards, I thought of them as good priests even though I was reluctant to be like them in a variety of ways. During my seven years of seminary formation I had realised at times that it accommodated distorting perspectives that expected unquestioning compliance. By that time I had learned to pass over my discontent and press forward to being ordained. I am sure that, sooner or later after Ordination, many priests have woken up to and striven to recover from the distortions of hierarchy and patriarchy that inhabit clericalism. I am also sure that other priests prefer to enjoy their privileged status without questioning it.

In 1956, I was a 15 year old in my final year at a Marist Brothers' High School in Sydney. I was second eldest of four siblings who had migrated six years earlier with our parents to Australia from Belfast, Ireland. During the previous three years I had felt a growing attraction to become a priest. With encouragement from the priest who had been Chaplain for Migrants on the sea voyage we had made to Australia in 1950, I agreed to study Latin privately with him for my Leaving Certificate. He taught Philosophy in St Patrick's Seminary at Manly and I hoped that I might become a priest like him. As the end of 1956 and my 16th birthday approached, I needed to make a decision about whether I would apply

¹⁶ I realise that for some seminarians their absence from negative paternal influences in their family might have been a saving grace. "Good enough" fathering. No father is perfect and each father carries an inheritance of strengths and limits from his own experience of being fathered.

Absent fathers - for various reasons, fathers may be absent for significant periods of time as sons and daughters grow up. War service, prison detention, work that takes the father's time or requires him to work away from home takes the father away from the son, physical and mental illnesses and addictions may limit the father's exercise of leadership or even isolate him from the child. Likewise, conditions that affect the son's health may also render the father absent in some senses and to some degree. Many of these elements may be part of an ordinary "good enough" fathering when the father's leadership is consciously shaped to take the restrictions into account.

to begin studies in the Seminary at Springwood in the following year. This decision became part of my conversation with my parents.

It was a difficult conversation for me to have, particularly with my father, because as the year's end drew near I was feeling some responsibility to delay following this course of study. How would our family, now with five children, manage the challenge of making do financially, sustained by my boilermaker father's wages, and supplemented by my older sister's wages as an office assistant? Perhaps I would do better first to get a job and be a financial resource to our family for a while and even gain some tertiary education part-time. The priest who fostered vocations to the diocesan priesthood in Sydney, as well as the priest who coached my Latin study strongly advised me to go to the Seminary without delay. My mother trusted their recommendation and encouraged me to follow the priests' advice. My father, a convert to Catholicism, offered no resistance to my desire to be a priest, made no claim that I ought to help shoulder the financial burden, and said that I should do whatever I thought best.

Having no inclination for any other career except teaching, I chose to apply for admission to the Seminary, sensing some urgency to follow my attraction, conscious of stories of shame in the Catholic culture about men who "lost their vocation" through delay. I believed that if my attraction to the priesthood were not genuine then I would be sent home and I would take up my other option for a career. I was accepted and within a short time of entering the Seminary, I settled into the pattern of life there. I felt that I was in the right place and prayed that I would not be sent home.

As I look back, I recognise now, though not for the first time, that by entering the Seminary I gradually severed a natural connection with my father. For the next seven years, I missed the experience of growing up in close relationship to him, developing through that relationship a sense of what it is to be a man, a father, husband and worker in the society and economy of the day, what it takes to be a man with his own opinions about politics, culture, the Church, faith and what really matters in life. I expected that I would learn about integrating sexuality with living a celibate life from the Fathers, but I never did. It did not

seem right to turn to my father for access to his wisdom and experience in relating to women.

In good faith, I had preferred to trust strangers to provide a direction for my life that had already been prescribed in Canon Law. These priests, whom we addressed as Father, were appointed to the task of forming/training seminarians in turn to become priests, Fathers. They told us, and I believed them, that they knew what I and the other seminarians would need to do, believe and become in order to be ordained a priest. Nothing seemed to be more important to me at the time than being a priest, so I complied as cheerfully as I could despite occasional bouts of homesickness in the early years. For an isolated immigrant youth like me, with no kin in Australia outside my immediate family, the more than one hundred peers in the Seminary were a welcome source of companionship. I hoped and expected that after seven years of study I would be ordained with my peers and become a Father for the Catholic people in some Sydney parish. And so I did. I was ordained in 1963, with special permission from Rome to be ordained at 22 years of age.

The point that I want to make is that this substitution of "Fathers" for my own father had a significant effect on my maturing into adulthood. During the years of my training, I returned home to live with my family during a brief mid-year and a longer Christmas vacation. I was able to spend time then with my parents, sisters, and my two young brothers who had been born in the years of my absence. Part-time work in the Christmas vacation contributed some money for my upkeep in the Seminary during the year ahead.

I think that there were several outcomes from this substitution of Fathers for my own father. Obedient to the directions given to them, they sought to ensure the continuance of the priesthood by preparing men who would be suitable for membership in this privileged class within the Church. Over seven years, eager to be a priest, I gave my wholehearted attention to proving my suitability through success in academic learning, living the communal life, engaging in the daily spiritual practices, and by faithfully keeping the Seminary rules. There was no guarantee that everyone who began training would complete it. Over the seven years of formation, for a variety of reasons, about half of the seminarians

who commenced in 1957 withdrew or were sent home as unsuitable. In either case, they exited the seminary without explanation or farewell.

By contrast, except perhaps for sons in privileged families, the usual focus of fathering in those years of coming into manhood was understood to be the development of a significant relationship in which sons learned to become men in society and sometimes to take up their father's trade or profession. This focus on my relationship with my father was absent from my Seminary formation. His authority and influence in fathering me toward maturity through adolescent development was greatly reduced. At the time, I made no protest. His work in shipbuilding had been the work of his father and his uncles. He was motivated to bring our family to Australia so that we children would have opportunities for education and jobs that were not so physically demanding. I did not know what I was missing through my absence from home during those years¹⁷. I recall hearing about my teenage brothers having discussions and arguments with my father about their buying a motorcycle, their friendships with particular mates and girlfriends, and their making choices about what work career they would follow. My recollection is that my brothers made choices that did not always please my father and mother and yet they still continued to live at home or left home without experiencing rejection. They were learning to take responsibility for their choices and my parents were learning to love them in the face of resistance.

By contrast, I was becoming a member of the male elite within the Church where there was little encouragement during those years to have one's own ideas about significant issues in the Church or in society. Obedience, understood as compliance, was the nature of the relationship between the Fathers and the seminarians. There was no negotiation about rules, no learning how to resolve conflicts, no consultation at depth with us about matters of significance. The atmosphere was generally friendly and not usually repressive. As long as I did what I was told and met the required standards of behaviour and performance I

¹⁷ I was physically absent and emotionally removed from events that my father encountered as a worker in those years. His experience of "chasing overtime" and getting a second job as a cleaner at weekends in order to pay off the mortgage did not draw from me the appreciation and admiration that they deserved until later in my life when I contemplated marriage and parenting. Then, I saw him and his life with new eyes.

would gain approval and make progress through the years of training. I was a “good boy”. I was happy to be compliant because for the most part I trusted the Fathers to know what was true. They would indicate the best path to follow. I was moving along that path towards the priesthood, while my development towards adulthood and manhood was taken for granted or ignored.

“This is a training ground,

where one group is taught to lead and the other is made to follow.....

Masculinity mimicked by men who grew up with no fathers.....

I hear that education systems are failing,

but I believe they are succeeding at what they’re built to do,

to train you

to keep you on track

These words in Malcolm London’s poem, “High School Training Ground¹⁸”, tell of his years of schooling in the Chicago education system. They have a poignant resonance with my seminary formation and indeed with that of generations of clergy before me.

Seminary formation was designed to shape seminarians into members of the professional elite about which their fathers would probably know very little. Seminarians were required to learn how to be priests; through obedience to the Fathers they would gain approval in order to be promoted in time to ordination as Fathers. In my experience, the seminarians’ relationship with the priests who educated, disciplined, mentored and provided us with spiritual guidance and pastoral care was often shallow and generally cautious. Seminarians learned how the approval system worked. They found ways to hold to their idealism; to

¹⁸ Malcolm London’s poem, “High School Training Ground”, was filmed as a TED Talk in May 2013.

conceal major or minor distortions in their personality development¹⁹, and to conform to authority through obedience. They complied with Church regulations to gain access to the privileged state of the priesthood in which they would undertake the pastoral care of the faithful.

Though the ecclesiastical identity of a priest is largely prescribed, it nevertheless develops through his social experience of intimacy and community, work and leadership, faith and spirituality²⁰. As Erik Erikson described in his theory of psychosocial development, there is the developmental challenge to avoid social isolation and to mature in friendship and intimacy. Negotiating this challenge was circumscribed by the commitment of celibacy that each priest was required to make²¹.

Celibacy was unquestionable and hardly discussible in the time of seminary formation. Cultivating a deep friendship with another seminarian was forbidden. Though not stated explicitly in the Rule Book, the prohibition clearly sought to discourage and exclude homosexual relationships in the seminary. Priests saw themselves as being at the service of everyone, and expected themselves to offer them instruction, sacraments and pastoral care. There was no attention given in my seminary formation to attending to one's own human need for company and friendship. The approved practice was that of priests being friends only with other priests, and of relating with everyone else at a friendly, professional distance. At that time, friendship with women was seen as a potential source of emotional attachment and sexual sin that could lead to leaving the priesthood – "never be alone with a woman". There were whispers among seminarians, but no frank discussion with the Fathers, about good priests they knew who had "gone astray into marriage" and become "shepherds in the

¹⁹ I do not recall that anyone advised us that anxiety, depression, fear of conflict etc, are aspects of the human condition that might be addressed through education and counselling.

²⁰ After their ordination, some priests were invited to undertake postgraduate theological studies. Others were appointed as assistant priests in parishes, to chaplaincies in defence forces, or in universities and major hospitals.

²¹ In his theory of psychosocial development, Erik Erikson's proposed that along with the achievement of sufficient stability in their identity, young adults would also be faced with the challenge to avoid isolation by engaging in a variety of satisfying social relationships.

mist", a pathetic status which was seen as the ultimate betrayal of Christ and the Church.

This kind of formation for priests through hierarchical structures of compliance was provided by Fathers who themselves had received a similar formation. Indeed, this system that required hierarchical compliance has been the foundation for clerical life in seminaries worldwide for hundreds of years. The sacrifice entailed in complying at the time with whatever was required was regarded by most seminarians as worthwhile in the long run. Obedience would likely be rewarded one day by promotion to the special status of priesthood in which they would be able to do God's work with sacred powers and sacraments.

The life's work that priests undertook was described as self-sacrifice and service offered to God and the Church. Catholics could not live without sacraments – from Baptism to Anointing - if they were to gain eternal life. The usual minister of all the sacraments is a priest, except for marriage where the bride and groom offer the sacrament to each other. Nevertheless, a priest's presence as the Church's witness is necessary to validate the marriage. A lay Catholic may baptise in circumstances where no priest is available. However, there are no circumstances in which a lay Catholic might act to represent the Church to hear another's confession or anoint the dying. This form of access to the sacraments continues to give the priest a hierarchical prominence.

Currently, the predominance of older clergy and the diminished number of active priests has led to priests often being busy in meeting for the most part the ritual and pastoral needs of the faithful. There is a paradox in that the service providers are also the elite in the Church. Some people, including priests, see in this a quality of heroism in the priest's life. Others feel frustration that the quality of the parish community's life is made to depend on the physical, intellectual and emotional capacities of the priest. Only priests can provide much of what the faithful are told that they need. The structure for providing access to sacraments creates lay Catholics as a dependent class, with needs that they cannot meet for themselves or each other, in relation to the clergy as a class that alone can provide the needed sacraments.

Patriarchy and hierarchy in the formation of priests distorts creates a relationship of dependency between clergy and laity. Steven Murphy has aptly noted, "Adult education for ministry is regularly confused with socialization into the professional caste system that is called clericalism. The clericalist understanding of ministry is characterised by its elitism: special knowledge, power, language, dress, and privileges distinguish the minister, according to this view. In some denominations this mystification of the profession of ministry is complete: a distinctive ontology and vocation are posited for the minister. The claim is that the minister is distinguished not only by the character of his (sic) being, but by the quality of it as well. The focus of ministry education therefore is on the individual²²." The requirement that those who administer sacraments must normally be male priests supports their value as a privileged class, while their diminished number restricts the access that Catholics have to these sacraments^{23 24}.

The formation for identity and ministry in the Catholic Church that priests receive has created a psychological dynamic that perpetuates an ecclesiastical culture in which a "good priest" at any age is, in the words of Father Ted Kennedy of Redfern, a "boy in short pants", for whom obedience principally means compliance, silence and loyalty. Any critical inquiry or questioning of established teachings and practices in the light of emerging scientific information is likely to be discouraged. Questions about the nature of the Church in the modern world expressed in Vatican Council II discussions began to filter into classroom discussions towards the end of my formation in 1963.

With this quality and degree of compliance grounding the education and formation of priests for such a long time, it is not surprising that most current

²² Murphy, Steven 1985, Ministry and Profession, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol 4, No 4, 327-340.

²³ A solution to the shortage of priests includes importing priests from countries with English as a second language. Patriarchy and hierarchy are usually strong features of the traditional way in which many imported priests relate to Australian congregations that have more experience of women's ministry and exposure to women in public life. This cultural mismatch causes some dissatisfaction among many "Anglo Australians", but brings comfort to many first generation immigrants from the countries from which the priests have been recruited.

²⁴ There is no shortage of priestliness among Catholics; only a shortage of priests.

Catholic Church leaders comply with the directive from the Vatican that questions challenging Church practices, and discussions of alternative ways of being Church are to be excluded from Catholic public conversations, writing and research²⁵.

In a hierarchy, power is exercised downwards. The Bishop who is under the Pope, despite professed collegiality, has power over only the priests and laity in his diocese. Priests, in turn, have their domain of power over the laity. Among the hierarchy, it is unacceptable that resistance be directed upward to challenge prescribed arrangements. On several occasions, when members of the Australian Bishops Conference have spoken with frankness and imagination to Vatican officials, they have been treated shabbily.

I am under the impression that formation for hierarchy through compliance still continues in seminaries. Compulsory celibacy for priests and the exclusion of women from ordination enables the persistence of patriarchy in the Catholic Church. Fatherhood is used to describe the pastoral role of the Church, so that pastoral care provided by women where priests are not available is seen to be ministry only by deputation from the hierarchical Church, in a way that is designed not to threaten the privileged status of the priest. In the last fifty years, as a matter of necessity in regional areas of Australia some pastoral activities once reserved to priests such as Baptisms and funerals are now carried out by pastoral associates, the majority of whom are lay women, some of whom at this stage are religious sisters.

For centuries, the priest has occupied a place of unquestioned privilege within the Catholic Church with sanctions to back up his decisions. I recall in my childhood that adults sought permission from the parish priest to attend the funeral of a neighbour or relative who was not a Catholic. Likewise, permission was required to attend the marriage ceremony of people who were not Catholics. Catholics were forbidden to go into the church of other Christian denominations, or synagogues - so many of them would wait outside the church door to see

²⁵ Priests or Bishops who speak out to raise questions on topics such as Women's Ordination, sexuality and gender attract disapproval and exclusion from the Vatican and local Church authorities.

their friends, the bride and groom, or to offer condolences to the family of the deceased.

Despite the requirement of obedience, the seminary does not turn out to be a sausage factory that produces completely compliant priests. The identity of being Father as the self-sacrificing dominant male / "leading man" in the parish with answers for all the questions that matter in life has usually gained acceptance by seminarians. However, in my experience, priests have always had covert strategies for selective compliance with hierarchical directives, while they held on to their position among the elite. As in other hierarchical organisations, the ways around compliance are mostly informal, implicit and not at all surprising. They include "Don't ask, don't tell", "Look good when the Bishop is present", and "Say nothing to those in authority unless there is benefit for your own situation". Some other ways to defend against requirements to comply have included professed ignorance, denial, concealment, passive aggression²⁶.

There are also priests, especially since Vatican II, who have chosen openly not to comply and have expressed their alternative understandings and approaches to particular matters of faith and practice. Their voices have gained strength and courage through their participation in Priest's Associations. Some Bishops have also spoken out in resistance to ecclesiastical directives that they believe will compromise the Gospel.

At worst, some of those who became Fathers understand themselves to be instructors. They claim to be commissioned to form the faithful as if they are prescribed characters in an ecclesiastical play, rather than as the authors of their spiritual lives with the conscientious responsibility to weave together truthfully and carefully the gifts of grace, the message of the Gospel, church tradition, their personal giftedness and their life experience into a life of integrity that blesses God, our planet and all those with whom they share the planet.

²⁶ Bishops rely on the local pastor's honesty to send to him the money from Sunday collections. In my experience, the parish priest reserved to himself or his supervision the counting and the transfer of the money.

For centuries, formation for priesthood has replaced the process of formation for manhood and still does. Those who Father the mostly young men in seminaries have themselves been Fathered by priests who had no experience of fathering sons into manhood.

The system of clergy formation requires the priest to assume an identity of spiritual Father²⁷. Priests learn their identity and profession through instruction and oversight from those who are their teachers, confessors and disciplinarians. In this formation process, the relationship of fathering that in society is charged with the passage from boy to man is missing. The seminary process is concerned with the reproduction of a privileged class of clergy, a "royal family" entitled to honour and "first places". To remain within the privileged class requires ongoing obedience to orders and instructions by compliance and loyalty. Challenge to directions and instructions issued by Church leaders brings disapproval and shaming, isolation, loss of privileges, restricted opportunity for advancement and sometimes exclusion²⁸.

Just as it may take a village to raise a child, so it might be expected that it would take a whole local church to form its ministers, prophets and mystics. However, this is not the case as the Church currently designs it. The formation of priests is jealously guarded and confided only to those who can be trusted to socially reproduce members of the privileged class of clergy.

The Church chooses to parallel its life with military organisations in many ways as it sets about the work of recruiting, training and managing its candidates for lifelong ministry. Fathering the clergy for the alleged eternal benefit of the faithful is an expression of power by males of higher rank. Directions and instructions are not to be questioned by priests but are to be obeyed. Father

²⁷ According to an article on clergy in Wikipedia, the custom of giving the title Father to Catholic clergy in preference to The Reverend or Reverend Mr. seems to have appeared in Ireland in the 1820s. This title would distinguish a Catholic priest in Ireland from Anglican, Presbyterian or Methodist clergy. It is likely that this title transferred later through emigration of Irish Catholics to the United States.

²⁸ Crimes of sexual abuse are seen not to contravene the law of celibacy. They do not automatically alter a priest's clerical status. On the other hand, a priest's choice for marriage contravenes the requirement of celibacy and does bring such exclusion.

knows best because the Fathers who formed him insisted that Father knows best.

There is also an element of heroism in the life of the clergy Fathers. Priests are required by their promise of celibacy to renounce marriage and partnership as well as parenting. Their level of economic remuneration and upkeep is moderate, compared to that of other professionals. The declining number of clergy has the effect of reducing opportunities for collaborative ministry with other priests. Priests, especially those in regional areas, are often lone, lonely and exhausted by the amount of work that they are expected to undertake as they age²⁹.

In the formation of priests, emphasis on celibacy as a spiritual resource for encountering the Divine introduces the seminarian to dedicating himself to prayer, silence, and contemplation. Of course, mysticism and its practices are not restricted only to those who live as monks, nuns and priests in the world's religions.

Some priests embrace more deeply this contemplative aspect of celibacy especially as the implications of solitude in a celibate life become clearer to them.

After mature consideration, some priests accept celibacy as a restriction or self-sacrifice for the sake of a satisfying ministry of service within the Church, as well as service to many who are not Church members.

Some regard celibacy as an inevitable part of becoming a priest, a cost to pay for the reward of being priest with the rights and roles that the Church has established.

Some have made a choice for celibacy because it was required before they had gained a mature awareness of what relationships of mutuality entail.

Relationships of Celibate clergy with laity are expected by the Church to have a clerical quality. The priest is an elite person with sacred power in

²⁹ More than 20 years ago, John O'Donohue noted, "It is a difficult time to be a priest. Many of the support structures that religion enjoyed in a more uniform culture have now vanished. While this creates confusion and uncertainty, it can also free priesthood from the grid of clericalism.... The excitement of western culture is that consciousness is at a new threshold. Something profoundly subversive and new is being born. It is only imagination that can navigate this unknown territory."

the Catholic community, and the right to make a range of decisions, according to what he is allowed to do by Bishops and Pope.

Intended to be a way into spiritual development, as in other forms of monastic or devout life, celibacy nevertheless may give a spiritual foundation and legitimation to the structures of patriarchy and privileged male authority.

Celibacy may be accepted as the price of following one's vocation, a sacrifice that is necessary to receive the privilege of having sacred powers and being Father³⁰.

Father

What effect does being trained to be Father, principally by well-intentioned men without experience of fathering their child towards maturity, have on the priest? It may generate in him and in Catholics a sense that patriarchy and hierarchy are expressions of a divine law that embraces the whole of society, including the Church. By contrast, Jesus resisted dominant patriarchy, hierarchy and militarism in the society of his time; he challenged those structures of "power over" with the images of a wedding feast that welcomed all.

The story of the father with two sons in Luke's Gospel (15, 11-32) illustrates that a father is at times someone to wrestle with safely, someone with whom to test one's strength in collaboration and resistance. The younger son rejected the accepted patriarchal arrangements for inheritance that favoured first sons, argued for resources from his father, and disagreed with his father without either being shamed or rejected by the other. The father never disowned this son and provided him with what he needed for his journey. Troubled to hear of his young son's failed enterprises and subsequent humiliation, the father waited

³⁰ The appeal to self-sacrifice as a motivation for clerical celibacy may be part of a spirituality that avoids pleasure of various kinds (such as consuming alcohol). A shadow side of this abstinent spirituality is an expectation of being entitled to compensation for one's self-sacrifice and postponed gratification. There is an echo here with the complaint of the elder son in the story of two sons (Luke 15. 28). He had stayed at home to manage the farm as heir to the property. His protest was that he had never had a party in his honour such as the one that greeted the return of the son who had left home and "wasted his inheritance. It is possible that some paedophile clergy may regard themselves entitled to gain sexual pleasure through abusing children as a form of compensation for their self-sacrifice in serving the Church.

and watched with hope that the son might return. In their reunion, both son and father learned more clearly than ever the depth of their relationship. Among other parables and images for the community that Jesus was forming to give expression to God's dream for humanity, this parable clearly challenges patriarchy and hierarchy.

The use of Father to name the identity of priests is slippery. Though well intentioned as an honorific title to describe a benevolent relationship between priests and lay, as a metaphor "Father" risks being understood literally to confer "power over" in terms of the dominant familial role that patriarchy sustains. An assumption by priests and parishioners alike that a relationship of childlike obedience is due to the priest from everyone in the congregation is a distortion of the meaning of Christian community. A culture of obedience to "Father's" directions without question contributes to a supportive context for clerical paedophilia³¹. The hierarchical grooming of parishioners for compliant and trusting relationships with priests predisposes them to be unwittingly blind to the grooming of children by clergy perpetrators for compliance in sexual abuse, and to be likewise reluctant to speak up and out against what they see and hear about clergy abuse.

Sometimes seminarians encounter in their formation a clerical Father who has nurtured and challenged them to maturity like an "older brother". However, in many other cases their clerical Fathers are older males with power over them who have not fostered them towards adult qualities - self-awareness through critical reflection, self-worth, mutuality and a capacity for appropriate intimacy. These Fathers themselves generally have not seen their formative role as fostering growth into manhood that expresses the person's unique expression of priestliness. Because they themselves have been formed principally for compliance, they have not evoked initiative and confidence, leadership, creativity and resilience in seminarians. Their mandate was to equip the seminarians with the attitudes, knowledge and skills that are needed to become a clergyman.

³¹ Many victims of child sexual abuse by clergy testify to their experience of being unable to resist coercion because they had been taught that the people who had used power over them were holy people who had given their lives to God.

The leadership exercised in educating and forming priests for ministry, whether consciously intended or not, tends towards reproduction of a readymade clerical style of life comprising the priest's identity, intimacy, ministry and spirituality. The pattern of hierarchy and the values of patriarchy are deemed unalterable and are to be relied on to shape the priest's lifetime. The judgment about the seminarian's suitability for inclusion among the clergy lies in the hands of those who governed their formation, and the Bishop who may overrule the advice that he receives.

The language of Father and Fathering is more powerful than Pastor and Pastoring, terms used in some Protestant and Charismatic faith communities. Though the Pastor's role may emphasise authority in teaching and in directive pastoral care more than it evokes a parental relationship, it still lies within the paradigm of patriarchy.

The four positive dimensions of adult personality development that Erik Erikson proposed - Identity, Intimacy, Generativity, and Integrity - continue to develop or stagnate throughout life. They evoke each other into maturity in an interactive way. Each dimension changes in response to a change in any of the others. Wisdom comes from a life of learning rather than from routine adherence to a given and enforced code of conduct.

Without a culture of self-critical reflective practice that is characteristic among all within the Church, the Church is likely to continue on its way, locating the problem of clergy sexual abuse in the sexual sins of predators. This has shown itself in the self-protective response to protests over sexual abuse. Sacramental forgiveness for perpetrator's sexual abuse and relocation (perhaps after counselling) becomes the priority and criterion of what the Catholic Church has regarded as proper personal and institutional behaviour.

The clerical misuse of power that has become evident through the Royal Commissions hearings could not have taken place without the silence of almost the whole Church, hierarchy and laity. The sexual violence that perpetrators inflicted on powerless victims has been revealed in evidence given. There is another violence towards victims that remains covert. It seems certain that many Catholics, clergy and lay, who received information or had suspicions

about the abusive behaviour of clergy and laity in positions of power, did nothing to protect children, adolescents and adult women and men. Perhaps in retrospect many Catholics may recognise occasions when their awareness or sense of unease at the behaviour of clergy or other people in authority went no further. We may have preferred to hear and see no evil, perhaps to protect our livelihood or just to avoid a fuss. But we added to the violence.

Underpinning all the events of sexual, physical, spiritual and emotional abuse has been (and may still be) the belief shared by both perpetrators and victims that no one would believe the victim anyway and that nothing effective would be done to restrain the perpetrator.

“No one will listen to you or do anything to change what is happening” are chilling words for victims to hear. Some perpetrators would also tell the victim that they would go to hell if they told anyone about the abuse. This violent lie depicted God taking the side of “God’s special people” - priests, religious and lay men and women doing God’s work - against the victims. Their success in intimidating victims and the general failure by Church authority to stop them gave perpetrators confidence that they could take their sins of violence to Confession for forgiveness, and continue to misuse their ministry or work within the Church. The Seal of Confession would protect them from exposure and possible arrest for violent crime, while their victims had in most cases little or no Church protection.

Conclusion:

The Royal Commission cannot save the Catholic Church from itself any more than a judge’s sentence can prevent a criminal’s intent to offend again. Its findings can serve the Church by encouraging its intent, but critically examining its claim in the future to a reputation for being *semper reformanda*. The information brought forward by victims of abuse, the care of those who have supported them, and those who have sought to prosecute perpetrators can continue to contribute to a sincere Church on a pathway for learning to live with integrity.

What is needed is a conversion of heart to start again. It is likely that changes that the Church excludes from discussion hold some of the possibilities for the

renewal of the Catholic Church. What is not heard and is excluded from being heard is the lived experience of the members of the Church.

As long as Bishops and priests prefer compliance to learning with humility and compassion they are unable to provide the leadership that the Church needs. Any amount of good hearted service provision by the clergy does not make up for the leadership that the Church needs to embrace. Clergy and Bishops who show resistance to directives risk losing their ecclesiastical status, with a loss of public identity and exclusion from their life's work within the Church community. The hierarchy has been quick to act against clergy who have questioned Church requirements in a way that it has not been in dealing effectively with priests who have inflicted sexual violence on members of the Church.

The hope for change lies with the people of the Church. Over the last fifty years, many Catholics have already shown their decision to refuse compliance. Their response of many to *Humane Vitae's* failure to hear the changing consciousness of sincere Catholics has been a loss of trust in Church leadership. Catholics have seen promise for the Church's life in making marriage an option for priests, in removing the prohibition against women becoming priests, in listening to the changing consciousness of people about sexuality, gender and relationships based on their experience.

As the Church hierarchy closes its mind to these possibilities, many Catholics lose confidence and trust in its leadership and disobey by refusing compliance. Many are absent from the Churches and look for guidance elsewhere. They feel bewildered that the hierarchy's concern for its own privileged position and its insistence on obedience as compliance has become more important than obedience understood as people respectfully putting their heads together to learn from each other in order to reach wise decisions that express the life of the Gospel. Already, whereas some priests and Bishops may be unable to resist hierarchical power, Catholic laity do so. The Church's response to them is not trustworthy enough for them to believe in it and they have chosen to find a way to be free of the Church's hierarchical use of power.

How will the Catholic Church in Australia respond to the opportunity that this time of crisis bring?

Postscript

A young man approaches a rectangular frame on which he is about to weave a tapestry that is his life. He has felt a desire for God and heard a call to become a priest, and is ready to trust the frame that lies before him.

He notes for the first time that one side of the frame is marked "Patriarchy", and the other side is "Hierarchy". There are strong warp threads that pass over and back across the frame, linking Hierarchy and Patriarchy, ready to hold the tapestry firmly in place.

He has brought with him the weave threads that are the components that constitute the weaver's life. His ethnicity and culture is there, and his family history that may include immigration or the seeking of asylum, the loss of relatives through war, times of financial struggle, grief for deaths in childhood, and the vulnerability of lifelong disability. There are the joys of all his skills and passions, his friendships, his love of nature and travel, what he enjoys learning, his solidarity with those who suffer and with those who strive for change.

His threads carry his faith that probably had its origins in his family and school. There are also threads of personality, giftedness and vulnerability. He weaves in his desire to make a difference in serving the community. He is weaving in his spirituality and his sexuality, paying attention to the warp threads which show

him how these are to have place in the tapestry of priesthood. There are also some threads of uncertainty about his capacity to follow the path before him, whether he will be suited to a celibate life, whether he will be worthy of the attraction that he feels.

Diverse in colour, strength, ply and texture all these threads are materials suitable for making a fabric that is true to his origin and destiny. During his formation, the weaver learns to introduce the weave threads of his life in through the warp threads, instructed to follow a pattern that expresses a traditional weave. Clericalism is the tapestry of priesthood that the rectangular frame is designed to produce.

The traditional pattern of the clericalist tapestry is intended to be repeated in each weaver's tapestry even though every weaver's life brings threads that are both different and unique. Threads that do not sit well within the warp threads are likely to be subdued or even excluded from being part of the weaving.

Gender and sexuality are threads that appear in every weaving of life, expressed in a variety of ways. Eros is energy for living and a desire to join with others - humans, the natural environment and all living beings, and the whole cosmos. The threads of passion and vitality are expressed in myriad ways in different lives. Arts, music and creativity celebrate beauty in ways that lift the spirit. The desire for joining with others may draw a weaver of life's threads into finding connectedness through partnership / parenting or into other styles of shared living or into a fruitful contemplative solitude that nourishes many others.

In the tapestry of clericalism, sexuality is a thread that must be tucked into the warp in the form of compulsory celibacy. Some people, temperamentally suited to celibate life, may express their life's passion and compassion by joining with other humans and all living things in a variety of constructive and celebratory ways. Those not temperamentally suited for celibacy may feel misplaced among those warp threads that make it compulsory. Nevertheless, they weave their threads of intimacy, compassion and solidarity in the tapestry of the Catholic priesthood that commits the weaver to a life time of attentive and respectful connecting with the lives of others. Some weavers who weave a thread that finds and secures privilege and power for themselves at the expense of others

distorts the complexity and richness of human being and relationship. The result is violence.

New wine that is placed in old skins will split them and the wine will be lost. In new skins, the wine will serve its purpose to gladden people's hearts in their times of celebration. In a similar way, unless the old weaving frame of hierarchy and patriarchy is broken, it will continue to produce the distortions that privilege protects in clericalism. The weaving frame needs to be reshaped to honour women and men as equal and mutual partners in the expression of their priestliness. A circular frame of community, in which all have a place of dignity in common, provides for an alternative weaving that holds many forms for expressing priesthood and human being.

Celibacy and marriage for priests can both have a place in the circle of community. In a circle, where people see each other clearly and face to face, children will be better protected from all kinds of violence.

Alex Nelson

References

Murphy, Steven 1985, Ministry and Profession, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol 4, No 4, 327-340.

Nelson, Alex (1997). "Imagining and critical reflection in autobiography: An odd couple in adult transformative learning." Adult Education Research Conference.
<http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/1997/papers/33>

Schön, Donald A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.