Submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse

Culture of the Catholic Church

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Author’s Background

After 7 years study at St Columba’s College Springwood and St Patrick’s College Manly I was ordained as a priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney on 21/7/1962. After appointments to various parishes I left the priesthood (and eventually the Church) in 1976.

After leaving the Church I have worked in human service field in child protection, management of community health services, aboriginal health (in the Northern Territory) and assessment of the elderly for home care services. My last paid employment was as a Case Manager for the survivors of the 2009 Victorian bushfires in Victoria.

I am married and we have three adult sons.
Summary: The Culture of the Catholic Church.

1. The Catholic Church states its mission in negative terms. The fundamental doctrine is that of “Original Sin” as formulated by Augustine the Bishop of Hippo from 395 A.D to 430 A.D.

2. This doctrine states that all human beings are basically flawed and the Creator of the universe displays both anger and violence towards human beings.

3. Augustine was a guilt ridden former sex addict who had a negative attitude to human existence and he was extremely negative about women.

4. This doctrine of “Original Sin” was the basis for a number of significant decisions by the Church: the exclusion of the laity from decisions about selection of Popes, bishops and priests; The establishment of the Pope as the head of the Papal States; the regulation that celibacy is required of all priests in the Roman tradition; the brutality of the Crusades; the brutality of the Inquisition; the death squads used to eliminate dissenters; the justification of the pope waging wars to expand and defend the Papal States; the invention of a system of sacraments which enhanced the powers of the clergy and lessened the independence of church members.

5. Although the Church leaders have done some window dressing in recent times, the fundamentals of the Church remain the same.

6. The underlying theology, administration and practices of the Catholic Church contribute greatly to the failings of individual clergy and the Church administration has developed its own systems for addressing those failures.

7. The Catholic Church believes that in the ceremony of ordination the priest is permanently endowed with divine powers which are exercised through administering the Sacraments.

8. These powers are in no way limited by the depravity of the priest.

9. The Church prefers that the priest who has failed morally will return to the “state of grace” before exercising his divine powers.

10. Throughout its history those who wish to leave the priesthood are bullied and victimized and given no support to start a new life.

11. The “secularization” of the priest who leaves does not remove the divine powers but bans the priest from exercising those powers and removes the obligations the priest has to observe a celibate lifestyle and recite the “office”.

12. From both the spiritual and material angles the Church strives to retain those who have been ordained and the ordained is likewise pressured to stay in the system.

13. When the perpetrator of pedophile actions has confessed his sin in confession the Church regards the matter as finished.

14. In the Church’s moral code there is no burden on the perpetrator or his employer to provide any assistance for the victim.

15. Any assistance provided to a victim is done under the condescending heading of “pastoral care” or protecting the “good name of the Church”.

16. The Church response to victims of lecherous and pedophile priests has developed since the obligation of celibacy was first regulated in the 8th century AD and the over-riding issue for the Church has been to avoid scandal and to protect “The good name of the Church and its leaders”.
17. Most in authority in the Church regard the church response as adequate and regard the actions of civil authorities seeking further accountability as an infringement of its divinely provided spiritual leadership and therefore an unjustified attack on religion.

18. The day to day activities of the church serve as a grooming process for the church to gain a free workforce through what the church calls vocations.

19. Once in training the volunteer is subjected to processes of brutalization and humiliation which undermine self esteem and stress the total subjection of the individual to the Church.

20. In these grooming and training processes the Church aligns itself with most mass movements such as ISIS, Nazism, Communism etc. even though the doctrinal content might vary.

21. These training processes leave the trainee with a reduced self-esteem and a reduced capacity to make independent moral and lifestyle decisions.

22. After ordination, when the newly ordained are appointed to parishes, there is no occupational health and safety and the climate established in the seminary is maintained and frequently the young priest is isolated from his peers and older clergy continue the humiliation and brutalizing of the seminaries. There is no support or debriefing after the traumatic events young priest must face.

23. As an organisation the Church shows lack of insight into the prolonged traumatic processes to which trainees for the priesthood and religious orders are subjected and this is matched by the lack of insight and concern for the trauma suffered by the victims of clergy sexual abuse.

24. This lack of insight has led the Church to be satisfied with its response to the victims of rape and abuse by clergy.

25. This lack of insight also has led to Church officials uttering the mantra “There is nothing wrong with the system, what we are dealing with is the failure of individuals.” However great and obscene the failings of individuals are, the failings of the system (the Catholic Church leadership) are even greater and more obscene.
Introduction

The events of the past 50 years have led to the administration of the Catholic Church coming under scrutiny. Many people from very diverse viewpoints, such as members of the Church, a range of professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, police officers, teachers etc) and civil authorities are talking of a toxic culture in the administration of the Catholic Church. With a few exceptions the Church authorities invoke the mantra “There is nothing wrong with the system; what we are dealing with is the failure of individuals”.

There is much about the culture of the Catholic Church which is positive. It is almost as if there are two separate cultures in the Catholic Church. In one there are the ceremonies assisting families celebrate the birth of children and marriages and the ceremonial burying of the deceased; the housing of the homeless, feeding the sick, visiting and care for the marginalized; the strong voice on moral and political issues. All these have all been appreciated in Australian society. Unfortunately underlying this culture has been second culture that has become more apparent in recent times that has tarnished the image and made the voice on moral issues less credible.

The Church is naturally sensitive about discussing matters that might touch on and even call into question the Church’s claim to be guided by God, its claim to moral leadership, its claim to high moral standards and a leadership role among Christian Churches and other religions.

The Church sees its practices and traditions as divinely inspired so questions about its culture are often represented as secular society attacking religion.

My story is that of being totally immersed in and accepting of the Catholic Church as it was in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s I separated from the priesthood and then from the Catholic Church and now as a 78 year old I feel I have set myself free from the system which I now see as destructive of the human experience and either dishonest or totally lacking in insight regarding the harm done to individuals by this system.

I wish to present my views on the factors which have lead to the development and maintenance of this culture in the Church.

1. Theology on which the church culture is based

The culture of the Catholic Church is based on decisions about theology in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D.

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo from 395 to 430 A.D., is credited with formalizing the doctrine of “Original Sin” which is the basis of the Catholic Church’s paradigm of reality. Most modern Christian churches also use his work.
Augustine was a guilt ridden former sex addict who embraced Christianity and 11 years later was made Bishop of Hippo a port town on the North African coast.

In its simplest form this doctrine proposes that a crime of the first man and woman was so bad that it genetically modified all of their descendants in a way that made them unacceptable to the creator of the universe. (I note that in his evidence Cardinal Pell cited “Original Sin” as an explanation of his and others’ failures) The creator of the universe is represented as an angry violent God. Supposedly, this creator was fond of having sheep and goats killed in his honour but, because the crime of the first humans was so bad, the creator required the sacrifice of a human being to set things right. The torture and death of Jesus Christ is presented as the way of appeasing the angry violent God. Between the angry violent God and the rotten human race were God’s appointed intermediaries the leaders of the Christian Church who through history have felt justified in imitating the anger and violence of their God.

Augustine was negative about human life and was especially negative about women.

The church leaders of the time embraced this doctrine as the fundamental basis of the Christian religion. I believe this came about because of the political ambitions of the Church leaders.

There were far more positive explanations available. Irenaeus of Antioch, for example, had a very positive theology. He saw the Bible accounts as depicting a primitive human race trying to progress and develop. He saw the teachings of Christ as a means by which individuals and societies could improve. His ideas could be summed up in his famous “The glory of God is man fully alive.”

Unfortunately Augustine’s theology, with its underlying negatives about humankind and the creator, permeates all activities of the church: its rituals, theologies and the day to day messages given to followers.

The reasoning behind accepting the negative doctrine was that it gave immense power to the supposedly divinely appointed intermediaries between the rotten humans and the angry God. The only hope for the hopeless humans was to follow every word uttered by the leaders of the church because God had given them special powers and knowledge.

This model of the Church was clearly expressed by Pope Pius X in his Encyclical letter ‘Vehementer Nos” (Feb 8 1906)

“This Church is in essence an unequal society, that is to say, a society comprising two categories of persons, the shepherds [bishops and higher] and the flock. These categories are so distinct that the right and authority necessary for promoting and guiding all the members towards the goal of the society resides only in the pastoral body [the bishops]; as to the
multitude, its sole duty is that of allowing itself to be led and of following its pastors as a docile flock.”

This power to control their followers had become more and more appealing to the church leaders from the time of the Emperor Constantine (Emperor from 306 to 337 AD).

“Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the philosophers as false and by the rulers as useful” Seneca the Younger (4B.C – 65 A.D.)

The Emperor Constantine saw the multiple gods and religions within his empire as a barrier to his control and saw the logical advantage of a single religion with a single god. Christianity also had the multiple God aspect covered by presenting the one god being a trinity of persons.

Embracing Christianity was a political benefit for Constantine and provided the elite leadership group of the Christian Church with the opportunity to become a significant influence in the politics of the empire. As a result it became very appealing to this leadership group to develop theologies and practices in a way that gave them more and more control over their followers.

This doctrine and many other decisions of the church might have been justified by the “streaker” defence “It seemed like a good idea at the time” if the Church was able to use it. Unfortunately the decision is set in stone by a Church that sees its traditions as having equal status with the Bible and of course the declaration of Papal Infallibility meant there was no way out that didn’t involve a major admission of being wrong.

The Christian churches vary in their explanations of how the process works. The Catholic Church opts for the explanation that baptism magically alters the human being from being alienated to become acceptable to the creator. This status of being acceptable to the creator is maintained by the sacramental system and rituals of the church. Of course all of these processes are tightly controlled by and dependent on the clergy.

When explaining this process the church resorts to various kinds of convoluted explanations but usually revert to the all purpose explanation “It is a matter of faith”. As a result any questioning of this doctrine is seen as undermining the basis of the Catholic Church belief system.

The next step in the journey occurred early in the 6th century when the elite leadership of the church decided to exclude lay people from having any say in the election of the Bishop of Rome. Eventually the exclusion was extended so that the members of the church have no say in the selection or appointments of bishops and priests. This was a significant step in the process of making lay people second class citizens in the Church.
In spite of taking control, the church leaders still often use such expressions as “Servants of the people of God” to describe themselves. These servants are not selected by the people of God and they are accountable to no-one but themselves.

In the 8th century there were two more decisions made by the leadership of the church which greatly multiplied the long term problems for the church.

2. Regulating that clergy be celibate

The initial attempt to impose celibacy on the clergy occurred in the middle of the 8th century. It was done by a regulation which required candidates for the priesthood to make a promise at the time of ordination to the bishop that they would remain celibate. While some monks were celibate for spiritual reasons the total imposition of celibacy on the clergy was done to protect the property of the church from claims by the children of the clergy.

From the point of view of the Church leaders the imposition of celibacy was not a significant issue because human nature was rotten and the Church was all about the next life not this present human condition. Any pain or suffering from this or other decisions was seen as an integral part of preparing for the next life often linked to the pain and suffering of Jesus.

The Church leaders’ negative attitude to sexuality was expressed quite regularly and these statements were frequently closely linked to statements demonising women.

Within a hundred years of celibacy of the clergy being regulated, a Council at Aix-la Chapelle (in the 9th century) acknowledged that abortions and infanticide took place in convents and monasteries to cover up activities of uncelibate clergy. In the 10th century, St Ulrich, a Bishop, argued from scripture and common sense that the only way to purify the church from the worst excesses of uncelibate clergy was to permit priests to marry.

The justification for the imposition of celibacy varied greatly. Clearly it was based on Augustine’s negative attitude to human life and the general tone of his theology. This was confirmed by Pope Gregory “the Great” (590-604 AD) who said that sexual desire is sinful in itself.

The attitudes of Popes to celibacy varied over the centuries. Apparently Benedict IX dispensed himself from celibacy and resigned in order to marry. Pope Urban II was another hardliner who had priests wives sold into slavery and the children were abandoned. There was a threat of excommunication on anyone who helped these women or their children.

Even making allowances for the mores of the times, this abuse of human rights was only possible in the church because of the underlying negative attitude to human life. This is also an early example of how the church regarded as insignificant the detrimental effect of its actions
on the individuals. It is from these times that the Church began to develop means to protect the good name of the church from any scandal. (By fair means or foul).

The monasteries and convents took the imposition of celibacy even further. As well as making a virtue out of a vow of celibacy they added for the good management of their organisations vows of poverty and obedience. These vows reduced the members to the level of slavery — denial of basic human rights- but most of them certainly made up for the period of denial when it became their turn to be in charge.

The superiors in the Church organisations saw the underlings as being obliged to follow their bidding. The commands of the superior were “the voice of God”. This assumed power of the leadership and their representatives, the clergy, seems to have often been used by the lecherous and pedophile priests to intimidate their victims.

3. The Pope as head of The Papal States

The political influence which Constantine brought in to the affairs of the Christian Church progressed as the politics of Rome waxed and waned though incompetence and invasions. Eventually the opportunity arose for the Bishop of Rome to include in his duties those of the political head of what would become the Papal States. Once this civil political role became a significant part of the Pope’s responsibilities the whole governance of the church became even more tainted.

In the history of the election of popes there were at least 24 occasions when the leading candidates were murdered and the suspected murderer won the election. The popes became war lords and many of them lived up to the murderous traditions of that role. The affairs of the church took on more and more trappings of this type of dictatorship.

The ceremonies and rituals were harnessed to emphasise the power of the church and its representatives. The sacramental system was developed to emphasise the essential role of the clergy and the dependence of all human beings on their intervention. The mantra was “Outside the Church there is no Salvation.” And of course life after death and “salvation” from the rottenness of the human condition was the whole focus of the church.

Side by side with this emphasis on the ritual perfection of the Church and the need to protect its good name at any cost was the normalisation of violence which was part of the role of the Pope as a war lord. Theologies had to be developed to accommodate the wars and murders carried out in the name of the Church. Eventually there were the logical developments which saw the rape and murder of the Crusades and the brutal developments of the Inquisition. Those who carried out these activities in the name of the Church were always cleared of blame and granted plenary indulgences.
The theologies and practices developed to normalise this extreme violence have never been changed so that underlying the Church of today are the same principles that allowed and justified that violence.

The violence and crusades of ISIS and other similar organisations are seen as extreme versions of Islam but the brutal violence of the Christian Church was an integral part of its day to day life and was often initiated from the top.

In Catholic tradition there were some cryptic sayings that summarised the normalising process. As regards performing religious acts the saying was “If doing it once is good then doing it a thousand times must be better”. The Catholic religion became a pandemic of compulsive practices of multiplying attendance at masses, going to confession, reciting litanies etc all directed at emphasising the helplessness of the individual without the powerful intervention of the church and its clergy.

Another saying which reflects the controlling nature of the church was” In the Catholic Church everything is either compulsory or forbidden.” The idea of individual responsibility and capacity to make value judgments is totally against the controlling nature of the church. Little wonder that many bishops in Australia were opposed to the teaching of ethics as part of school curriculum. It would help people think and lessen the control of the church over its members.

4. Spirituality

There are many streams of so-called spirituality which have flourished in the Catholic Church. Most start with a negative attitude to human life and then add layers of negative thoughts about the “creator” and the total dependence of followers on the administrations of the church. This spirituality enforces a message that is negative about self-esteem and human achievement and always dependence on the clergy.

What has developed in the Church based on the theology of Augustine of Hippo has steadily become more and more distant from the mantra of Irenaeus “The glory of God is man truly alive”.

5. Powers conferred on a priest by the Bishop at ordination

“You are a priest forever” these words are intoned at ordination and in the eyes of the Church the powers given to the priest can never be taken away. The Church might grant a dispensation to a priest who leaves but only from the obligations of saying the “Office” and from the regulation of celibacy but it considers that the magical powers conveyed at ordination can never be removed.
In order to use the powers a priest requires the permission of the bishop of the diocese. The permission is graded so that a newly ordained priest has limited approval and for a short determined period of a few years. This permission is required to act “lawfully” in the church but if the priest uses his powers without permission his acts are considered “valid”. The written permission from the Bishop is called the granting of “Faculties”.

While this method of supervision of a priest is theoretically in the control of the Bishop, in practice the Roman Curia will often intervene so that some Bishops just turn a blind eye rather than take on prolonged conflict with the “Head Office”. The Church’s “diplomatic service” operates as a hidden power in these matters and this means that they see themselves as having diplomatic immunity when advising and pressuring bishops to follow the Church’s policy of covering up the moral failings of a priest. I believe the “diplomatic service” still sees the Church’s law and operations as above laws of any particular country. Those actions taken by civil authorities, in questioning the activities of priests and bishops, are seen as unnecessary and are an attack on the Church.

The “mystical” or “magical” powers conveyed on the priest are in no way diminished by the depravity of the priest. The Church prefers the priest to be in the “State of Grace” (with no serious sin that has not been confessed) when administering sacraments but if the priest has committed some serious “mortal” sin his powers to administer the sacraments remains.

6. Flawed moral code

The Church makes a great show about its moral leadership. As a result of lack of external accountability the Church’s moral code has developed some unacceptable flaws.

- Protecting the Good name of the church v protecting children from rape and abuse by clergy

When an organisation and its leadership is able to give protection of its reputation higher priority than the protection of children from rape and abuse, the organisation loses all credibility in civilized society and its whole system need to come under scrutiny from outside. There have been frequent indications that bishops in Australia who acted in this way were doing so under instructions from Rome with the Church’s diplomatic service sometimes being involved.

Some bishops have come to see how obscene their actions were. Most do not see anything wrong with the church practice.
• No obligations of compensation/restitution.

There is a second flaw in the Catholic moral code which has become apparent. If the pedophile priests were guilty of damaging property or stealing they would be bound to make restitution; to pay back money or goods which were stolen or to make good the damage they had caused. The Church sees the actions of pedophile priests as moral failings and not bearing any component of restitution. The attitude of the Bishops has been that once the offending priest has been to confession it is presumed that he is forgiven by God and the matter is over and done with. It is on record that the present Archbishop of Sydney regarded as petulant when more than this was sought by the parents of two girls who had been abused by a priest. The Church’s moral code does not regard the victim’s welfare as a matter of concern regardless of the harm inflicted by the abuse they suffered. Even the most primitive legal systems make allowance for some kind of restitution to be made when injury or damage is done to a person. The Church uses such condescending terms as “Pastoral Care” which describes actions which are not responding to the rights of the victim but rather the “kindness and generosity” of the Church or its representatives.

• Blinkered version of responsibility.

The Church has a very narrow understanding of conscience which seems to mean “keep the church laws and rules” and no individual initiative is needed.

• Leaders who promote the observance of Australian laws v Leaders who take instructions from a foreign country (The Vatican) to ignore Australian Law

The leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia and other countries have shown a willingness to conceal knowledge of criminal offences and to protect the perpetrators. The knowledge was not acquired through the sacrament of confession so there was no reason to believe it was protected information. The Church apparently regarded its own legal processes as superior to
those of the nation. Instructions from the Vatican and actions of the Vatican’s representatives in no way excused this behaviour. It could not be claimed that it was a matter of faith but rather showed a willingness to place loyalty to Australia and Australian law beneath loyalty to a foreign power. Does this justify charges of treason?

7. The church has developed into an organisation which displays all the negative aspects of a Mass Movement.

In a speech in March 2014 the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, presented some ideas about how young people were being groomed to become members of ISIS. In the speech the work of Eric Hoffer “The true Believer” is cited. The book explores the common elements of mass movements. In the following, I look at how the processes I experienced in the Catholic Church of the 1950s match the way mass movements engage young people to be their free workforce.

“All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance; all of them are capable of releasing a powerful flow of activity in certain departments of life; all of them demand blind faith and singlehearted allegiance.”

Preace: “The true believer”; Eric Hoffer.

The following points were made in Ms Bishop’s speech and are a useful summary of how Hoffer saw the functioning of any Mass Movement.

- Mass Movements appeal to the frustrated: those who see their lives as irremediably spoiled.
- These people are attracted to the “total surrender” of oneself to a greater cause where others take responsibility for the decisions which determine whether or not their lives are successful.
- This can be cultivated into an extreme form of devotion where people are willing to sacrifice their lives in support of the ideology. Dying or killing seems easy when they are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance or game.
- The mass movement must break down all existing group ties; the followers must be convinced that following the rules and practices of the movement are more important than family or community.
• The long term or eternal aims of the movement are more important than any present pain or suffering.
• The doctrines of the mass movement must not be questioned under any circumstances.
• In the mass movement the individual's personal goals, opinions, feelings, development etc are unimportant. The mass movement’s preoccupation is to foster, perfect and perpetuate a facility for united action and self sacrifice.
• For this end, the mass movement demands a total surrender of a distinct self. Every important part of the true believer’s persona and life must ultimately come from identification with the community within the mass movement.
• Mass movements use play acting and spectacle designed to make the individual feel overwhelmed and awed by their membership in the tribe.
• Mass movements idealise the past and glorify the future but the present day world is denigrated.
• Mass movements aggressively promote the use of doctrines that elevate faith over reason and serve as “fact-proof screens” between the faithful and the realities of the world.
• Those being targeted for membership are encouraged not to discuss their plans with their parents or other members of the family.
• Those who have joined a mass movement and then have second thoughts and want to leave are subjected to abuse and even killed.

All of these behaviours of mass movements apply to the Catholic Church is its recruitment, training and supervision of its free labour force.

For Hoffer the word “frustrated” indicates people who for one reason or another feel that their lives have been spoiled or wasted. For the Catholic Church human life has no value except as a preparation for the next life. The human process holds no value it is rather a barrier, “a temptation”; a trial to see if a person is worthy of the next life. As a result members of the Catholic Church are continually bombarded with negative thoughts about life and their innate rottenness or propensity for evil. The only way for life to mean anything is to become totally subservient to the leadership of the Catholic Church.
All the rituals, sacraments, teachings and celebrations were designed to continually groom the members of the church to accept this role of the elite leadership. Individuals were to accept that their value was totally dependent on the activities of this leadership group.

Criticism of the leadership group is regarded in a similar way to criticism of the Royal Family in Thailand. Pedophile and lecherous priests, bishops, cardinals and popes can all be accommodated and protected in the Church. Even some fraudulent activities can be tolerated as long as the Vatican gets its cut. But any priest or bishop who questions decisions or wants matters discussed that the leadership doesn’t want discussed will be quickly removed from office.

The day to day climate in the Catholic Church normalizes the range of beliefs that test the members’ ability to suspend reason and accept matters of faith. The underlying negative message serves to undermine the self esteem and valuing of self worth of the Church member. Thus the life of the Catholic is a grooming process that makes the individual vulnerable to the message that the only way to achieve anything in life is to give one’s life to a religious vocation. The onus is placed on the member to find a reason not to follow a vocation. To reject the way of life of a vocation is presented as dangerous with many dark stories about what happens to those who choose not to follow their vocations.

Between the age of 12 and 17 I was subjected to processes which would greatly influence my life. Because I was Catholic, the processes were described as encouraging me to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

A “Vocations” booklet produced in Ireland in 1928 was still being circulated in Churches in Australia in the 2000s. The author was Rev William Doyle S.J. and the booklet had the “Imprimat potest” of the Archbishop of Dublin.

It begins with a quote from Cardinal Newman “Alas, alas, for those who die without fulfilling their mission! Who were called to be holy but lived in sin... over the loss of vocations, the disappointment of hopes and the scorn of God’s love and the ruin of souls.”

The booklet outlines how all members of the Church have a responsibility to encourage young people to consider a “vocation” and condemns those who might discourage young people from dedicating their lives to service in the Church. It uses the term “endless harm” to describe the effects of those who encourage young people to delay the decision to follow their “vocation”.

There is a quote from Archbishop Lynch of Toronto “I think it is no exaggeration to say that every priest is the means of saving at least 5,000 souls from being lost eternally in Hell.”

Later (P 19), regarding those who do not follow their vocation: “Can it be wondered at that deprived of the special graces destined for them the lives of those who have refused to follow
or have abandoned a decided vocation are generally unhappy and too often, as every confessor knows, sullied with great and numerous sins."

The twisted mentality is well depicted on page 21 of the booklet. "I remember well that the pain I felt when I left my father’s house was so great (he would never give his consent to my entering) that I do not believe that the pain of dying will be greater, for it seemed to me that every bone in my body were wrenched asunder. When I took the habit Our Lord at once made me understand how He helps those who do violence to themselves in order to serve Him." Page 23 "When the devil sees in anyone a religious vocation he does everything possible to prevent him from following that attraction. Of all the means he makes use of the love of one’s parents is the most powerful and dangerous."

Page 27 A quote from St Alphonsus Liguori clearly shows the mind set in which those who followed vocations were travelling first class while those who did not were second class in the Church’ paradigm. “A religious lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is bedewed more frequently with heavenly graces, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purged more quickly and is rewarded more abundantly.” A definite basis for a case of false advertising

The seminary training focused on conformity where personal opinion and feelings were irrelevant. Daily routines, where all times of the day were controlled by bells, and the program was specific about where and what the student would be doing for the whole day. The routines included silence periods during the day and at night the “summum silencium” went from 9:30 in the evening till after breakfast the next morning which was about 8:30. Many meals were in silence so that systems of signs were developed to request items as they were needed.

We were allowed occasional visitors but it was forbidden to bring food back after visits. One of the Rector’s favourite tricks was to call a number of students to his office to answer questions about bringing food back to the college. This is where catholic guilt was laid on thickly so students felt they had to answer truthfully. If they admitted to bringing food back they would then be asked if they shared it. If they said “yes” they would be accused of corrupting other students. If they said “no” they would be accused of being a glutton.

In these and many other ways the climate was one of demeaning the student and undermining self-respect and self esteem.

Most of the teaching staff at the seminaries had been sent to Rome to study so that when they came back, with their neatly packaged theology but no training as teachers, they were able to spread the system and mind set of the Roman seminaries. The whole purpose was to produce clergy whose mindset was simply to present the teachings of the church as approved by Rome and to be willing to work with deference to the authority of the Church. In 1958 the moral
theology text book we were told to purchase was in Latin and had been written 150 years previously by a lecturer in one of the Colleges in Rome.

The message was that we were giving our lives to service of the Church and although this was important as individuals we didn’t matter.

Allowing ourselves to be subject to the daily processes of training, loss of independence and humiliation clearly indicates how we accepted the paradigm of the Church and were totally immersed it the Church’s depiction of the reality of the world and our part in it i.e. “Eternal salvation is the purpose of human existence and the only way to achieve this is to follow, without question, all the directions of the Church.”

After ordination the system maintained the treatment wasn’t any better and the pressure to conform was maintained.

The training had focused on the knowledge and skills useful for Church purposes and regarded all other knowledge as superfluous. The training was not complete as many of us found out later when we experienced the trauma of ministering to the dead and dying without any preparation apart from being given a book in Latin with all the words to be said and the instructions about what to do also in Latin and in red ink. Of course there was no debriefing after these experiences. It was all just bottled up and of course our feelings and reactions were seen to be of no importance.

Young clergy mostly were placed with older priests and human decency and respect were rare commodities. The climate in most presbyteries was judgmental and intolerant and little if any support given to the newly ordained. The isolation of the seminary was now an extreme reality and the young priests had to develop their own means of coping with this reality. The one day off a week to spend with peers didn’t address the impact of this isolation.

The priest was expected to pretend that this was unimportant and to maintain the appearance of being happy with life. This mask or pretence is an essential part of the clerical lifestyle.

The majority of the clergy develop non-religious forms of coping. Alcohol, lechery, expensive holidays and a bizarre range of hobbies are all tolerated by the Church authorities as long as scandal is avoided and the “Good name of the Church” is protected.

The Church is aware of these activities and manages them, and has always managed them, as part of the cost of the regulation of celibacy.

Those who have left the service of the church were often ostracized and abused. When one priest I knew left the priesthood his mother could not stand the shame and never left her house
again. It is recorded that a priest in Ireland who announced that he was leaving was severely beaten up by his own relatives because he brought shame on the family.

In Australia while some who leave are given support and financial assistance most are not. In my work after leaving I have come across many ex-priests, nuns and brothers who have been given no support and because of failing health were living in poverty.

The hypocrisy of the situation was recently highlighted by Pope Francis in a statement about employers:

"You cannot make donations to the Church on the back of the injustice that you commit with your employees," the Pope said, the online news site reports.

"Using God to cover injustice is a very grave sin," he said, adding: "If you go to Mass on Sunday and take communion, you should ask: What is the relationship with your employees? Do you pay them off the books? Do you pay them a fair salary? Do you pay the pension contributions?"

8. Conclusion

The apparent authorities of the Church are very visible around the world but the puppet masters are an unaccountable group in the Vatican often called the Curia. This group has been able to maintain itself and its power through history and has avoided all external accountability. It will sacrifice members under the mantra "There is nothing wrong with the system, what we are dealing with is the failure of individuals".

The toxic culture which runs the Catholic Church today will not change till these faceless people are brought to accountability by civil authorities.