

# Royal Commission Case Study 50

## Catholic Church Final Hearing



Tuesday 14 February 2017 – Day 7

The panel discussion on Day 7 of Case Study 50 focused on initial formation of clergy and religious and the professional support and supervision of working priests and religious.

Panel participants included Dr Lydia Allen rsm, Psychologist and Director of Human Formation, Seminary of the Good Shepherd in Sydney; Fr Peter Thompson cm, Rector at Vianney College in Wagga Wagga, and former superior of the Vincentian Fathers; Fr John Hogan, psychologist and former parish priest, now Rector at Holy Spirit Seminary in the Diocese of Parramatta; Fr Brendan Kelly sj, Novice Director and Province Delegate for Jesuit Formation; and Dr David Leary ofm, Secretary of the Franciscan Province and Lecturer, Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity.

Each panelist profiled the demographics of the seminary or formation house in which they are involved, including student numbers and age range; number of overseas candidates; the duration and structure of the formation period and current approaches to the screening, selection and training of candidates. There was considerable variation in approach evident.

The panelists reported a general increase in candidate numbers in recent years, with ages of seminarians currently in training ranging from 18 to mid 30s, with the exception of the Jesuits who currently have five candidates aged from 27-57. Dr Leary noted there are no Franciscans currently in formation in Australia.

Given the length of formation (generally seven years, 14 years in the Jesuits) in some seminaries it was suggested that seminarians should undergo psychological testing at the commencement of their training and also at the conclusion. There was some suggestion that formal formation time should be reduced, in favour of a greater emphasis on learning via interaction with community and through pastoral work.

Dr Leary told the Commission there needed to be other processes in place in seminaries in addition to psychological testing, which nurture candidates. It was his view that observation over time was far more telling and conclusive than a snapshot of psychological process obtained during formal assessments.

Referring to the historic Tridentine model for seminary training, arguably still used to varying degrees in some seminaries, Dr Leary said a starting point for formation should not be one of protecting, isolating, "cocooning" of the candidate, but rather exposing him in a guided way to a whole range of thought, ideas and experiences that he can then reflect on.

Commissioner Fitzgerald asked the panel about his perception that the seminary model today has profound weaknesses, including limited integration of seminarians with the community, with the outcome that it is producing men for ordination who have "re-embraced clericalism", said to be a contributing factors to the abuse of adults and children. He observed that seminarians seen to be

wearing clerical garb and attending masses said in latin seemed "to those on the outside... like reversion to a former model".

Commission Chair Justice Peter McClellan said clericalism has had catastrophic consequences and he urged panel members to think about how the laity perceived current practice.

Commissioner Murray noted that the Commission had heard consistently from victims and survivors that the greatest weakness of the institutional response of faith-based organisations was their pastoral response. He asked the panelists to describe the steps seminaries are taking to educate seminarians so as to address this.

Discussion also went to the directive from the Vatican that men with 'deep seated' homosexual tendencies should be excluded from the priesthood, and why this was the case when celibacy was mandated; whether or not the seal of confession applied to a child disclosing abuse, and to perpetrators confessing abuse during confession and what seminarians were being taught about these issues; the possible role of the notion of "ontological change" in power imbalances between priests and the laity; and possible cultural issues arising from the recruitment of overseas seminarians and priests.

Knowledge and opinion across the panel varied in response to these issues.

The hearing continues tomorrow with a panel to consider approaches to ongoing formation of priests and religious in the morning, and current safeguarding practices in community services agencies in the afternoon.

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