

Thursday May 25th 2017.

To the Editor,

On Saturday May 6th an insightful article about Francis Sullivan, the Catholic Church's CEO of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council was published in the Weekend Australian Magazine. In noting that the overall tone of the article was insightful it also highlighted some very concerning elements within our Church and consequently I felt compelled to write a response to the Editor of the Australian.

My letter was not published in The Australian and I am keen to advance the conversation about the future shape of our Church and have thus been advised to send in this abridged version to The Swag.

I met Francis Sullivan when the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse sat in Ballarat in 2015. At the time of the hearings I sat through three days of gut wrenching, heartbreaking testimony from numerous survivors of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy in the Catholic Church. The testimony has had a lasting impact on me, particularly given that I have two first cousins who are no longer with us because the reality of the pain caused by sexual abuse became too much for them to bare.

Francis Sullivan struck me at the time of the hearings as being a profoundly decent man. He is someone committed to finding the truth about the Catholic Church's responses to sexual abuse, who actively seeks justice for the survivors and victims of the abuse and who is dedicated to reparation and healing for all members of the Catholic community particularly, survivors.

As a principal in a Catholic Primary School I admit to feeling deeply concerned, indeed angered by some of the responses shared in the article by more conservative elements of the Catholic Church. It seems to me that some of these people, notably Fr Glen Tattersall, Catholic Priest and member of the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy, hanker for a model of church that is a complete anachronism.

To have suggested that the problems of the Catholic Church lie with, "the liberal minded and their fellow travellers who have been wrecking the Church over a number of years," is mind-bogglingly ignorant of the pain and horror that many thousands of children endured at the hands of Catholic clergy! That any Catholic shouldn't / wouldn't feel some level of collective shame on our Church for the gross abuses of the past, all of which occurred because of Church sanctioned cover-ups is equally baffling.

The rhetoric of Glen Tattersall (at least as he quoted in the Weekend Australian Magazine) is that of a person in denial. It is the language of judgement. It is driven by an ideology of dominance and superiority as opposed to genuine love and support. I'm interested to know who Tattersall's "best priests in Australia" are? The wonderful priests I know would feel equally appalled by his

hankering for a bygone era that has caused so many thousands of people such life changing anguish and pain.

Frank Brennan is right. The Catholic Church has long 'lost it's moral authority in Australian society.' Whilst it is always important to respectfully listen to all views, even challenging and unpalatable ones, it is similarly important to call out ignorance and paternalism for what it is.

The views expressed by Glen Tattersall are not representative of the Catholic community in which I worship every week. They are not representative of the 216 wonderful families in my Catholic school community and they certainly will never be taught to the magnificent 356 children in my school, whilst I am here anyway!

After 3,066 claims of child sexual abuse resulting in payments being made following claims for redress against the Catholic Church; with some 572 sexual abuse perpetrators being priests (30 per cent of all known alleged perpetrators), 384 diocesan priests and 188 religious priests; with estimates varying about the numbers of still unreported cases of sexual abuse simply because so many people remain incredibly damaged by the abuse they endured and disinclined to report, surely we as a Catholic Church have reached a point where we have heard enough shallow 'justification' of the evil of the past. Surely we can find the voice to vociferously challenge those of indifference represented by Glen Tattersall and the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy whom he purportedly represents.

In my mind we have reached a point of no return. Fine men like Francis Sullivan, fine priests, fine leaders of Religious Orders and lay leaders in the Catholic community have been delegated responsibility by the Catholic Church to begin the monumental process of finding truth, justice and healing for all survivors and victims of sexual abuse.

These people in leadership are the future of our Church. They represent and promote the message of Christ in a world that craves peace and love yet speaks of division and retribution. They deserve to be given respect, not condemnation for having the courage to speak out against conservative voices that represent a Church that according to Francis Sullivan, "still doesn't get it."

Despite hankering for a Church that is long gone it is the new leaders of the Catholic Church who will help us all ensure that the evils of the past are never revisited on the children of today or tomorrow.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Maher