

Blog



Putting in a good word for the institution will not bolster morale, nor ease the pain of humiliation

Francis Sullivan 19 December 2017

Now that we have the Royal Commission's final report it is hard to know what to say.

It is almost as if nothing else can or needs to be said.

The Report does speak for itself.

The five-year culmination of public and private hearings, voluminous submissions and documents and countless commentaries has left a landmark testament to the history of sexual abuse of children in institutions, most markedly in my own Catholic Church.

When I began this journey I often said that the history of the sexual abuse of children within the Church was confronting and shameful. Even today that is my overwhelming reaction. So too is anger. It still confounds me that it took a public inquiry of this potency to drag my Church into the open.

When the abuse statistics of the Church were revealed by the Commission, it was the very first time that the Church had come clean with the community.

Yet the individual Church Authorities obviously knew their histories dating back to the 1950s and even before. They knew the extent of the abuse but none of them had sought to counter the defensive narrative that prevailed from Church apologists who laboured to limit the scandal in the eyes of the public and to relegate it to a thing of the past.

Moreover, what is most disturbing is the ever-ready attitude from sections of the Church to always try and 'put a good word in' for the institution as if that is somehow going to bolster morale and ease the pain of this humiliation.

What it says to me is that once again the image of the Church means so much more than anything else to these apologists. That barracking for the recent innovations and improvements within the Church somehow puts the revelations of the Commission into some manageable context.

Again, I can't help but think that this speaks of an institution more obsessed with its own survival than one being humble and open.

Oddly, I have always been taught that a true faith disposition brings with it an openness to life's lessons and a sensitivity to learn from what is hardest to hear!

That said, our Council will now go into the bunker for the summer and digest the Final Report in order to supply the Church with an initial response.

Some may well want to 'jump us' on this, probably to try and influence things accordingly, but our brief is to produce a report by Easter 2018.

After that you can find me in a pasture somewhere!

So, until then I hope this Christmas is a blessed time for you and yours. A time to pause, breathe and believe.