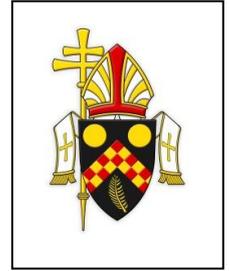


A RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S FINAL REPORT FROM ARCHBISHOP MARK COLERIDGE



The Royal Commission's examination of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and the response to it by leadership is now done. The final report is vast and its recommendations are many. So there'll be much to digest and act upon in the coming years as the full impact is felt in the Church and beyond.

The report reveals not only the appalling extent of the abuse but also the gross failure of Church leaders to deal properly with allegations, to deliver justice for victims and to co-operate with civil authorities. It shows that those who were abused within Catholic institutions were far too often not believed and that they were neither justly treated nor provided with adequate redress. For too long, the Church denied the extent of the abuse and its devastating impact on its victims, their families and their friends.

These years have been an agonising journey for everyone, not least for the victims who bravely came forward to tell their stories. We now know how difficult it is for those who've been abused to reach a point where they can tell their story; it can take decades. And one of the real achievements of the Royal Commission is that it's provided a safe space for survivors to be heard and to be believed.

For the Catholic community, it's been a deep humiliation, and I can only hope that humiliation will give birth to humility in a Church which accepts vulnerability beyond any attempt at justification or rationalisation, a Church willing to listen and learn, especially from the survivors of abuse themselves.

Sexual abuse of the young in Catholic institutions and its handling by Church leaders has been a colossal failure; and I can only express an acute sense of shame and apologise profoundly to all who have suffered. What has happened has done incalculable damage to those who were abused. It's also shaken the Catholic Church in this country to the core. Everything possible must be done to heal the wound, to right the wrong and to ensure that the future is very different from the past. Now that the Royal Commission is over, it can't just be back to business as usual.

The Church has to commit to change – not only personal change as each of us learns to see and hear differently, but institutional change as well. This will mean an ongoing transformation of our procedures and protocols in the area of safeguarding. Much has been done already, but there's no room whatever for complacency.

We'll also need cultural change – saying no to a Church that seeks its own protection and self-preservation at all costs, that turns in on itself rather than reach out to the wounded and distressed. This will also mean changes to incorporate greater transparency and accountability in the governance of the Church. I will establish one working-group to examine every aspect of governance in the Archdiocese and another to review how our current proactive policies fit in with the Royal Commission's recommendations and what more the recommendations will require of us.

We've begun to address the need for reform and renewal, recognising that confidence in the Catholic Church and trust in Church leadership are at an all-time low. The rebuilding of confidence and the restoration of trust will take a long time and there's no short-cut. It will be achieved only by a greater authenticity which is serious about reform and renewal and serious about the call of the Gospel.

The Royal Commission has been a searing experience for everyone, but for believers it's been an experience of searing grace – a grace we neither expected nor wanted but grace all the same. Church leaders have broken faith, but Jesus remains faithful: that's the grace. Faith asks the question, Where is God in all this? The abused God of Calvary is with us in the darkness. This is the God who took flesh in Jesus, and who still takes flesh in the mess of human life now. It's also the God who broke the power of darkness by raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrection isn't just an event of the past. It's an experience here and now for those who put their trust in the power of God's love, as we do now, confessing our sin and sharing our hope.

As one journey ends and another begins, I invite you to look with me on the face of Jesus Christ to see there both the sorrow of Calvary and the joy of Easter, to understand the past and to glimpse the future that the God in whom we hope is already preparing.

+ Mark Coleridge
December 2017