

Moving into the future

Pope Francis' controversial interview with Eugenio Scalfari, the ageing editor of the Italian newspaper the *La Repubblica*, has claimed headlines around the world.

In the interview Mr Scalfari quoted the Pope as saying two per cent of Catholic clerics and religious, including bishops and cardinals, are paedophiles.

Within hours of publication the Vatican put out a statement claiming the comments, attributed to the Pope, were not a precise transcript, but rather the product of the memory of an expert journalist.

Last week I was interviewed on [Lateline](#) and other media outlets regarding the data we are collecting in Australia. Our initial results indicate that from the 1940's to the present, around four per cent of men who have either been a priest or religious brother have been child abusers.

The figure of two per cent, attributed to the Pope, was specifically for paedophiles, which is clearly a much smaller category than the data we are collecting on child abusers within the Australian Catholic Church and may account for the lower figure

Our research will be presented to the Royal Commission at the end of the year. It is a time consuming and challenging exercise gathering accurate, consistent information from every diocese throughout Australia. We want to capture the correct details and uncover further information on the number of cases reported to police and how many perpetrators have offended more than once.

The specific details of the Pope's interview with *La Repubblica* may be in question, but what is certain is the Pope's strong stance on clerical sex abuse. He likens it to leprosy that needs to be cut from the Church like a cancer. He says there must be zero tolerance to clerical sex abuse. Previously he has compared child sex abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests to performing a satanic mass, and he has also spoken of the 'toxic effect' of abuse, which he admitted had ruined many lives.

Importantly, the Pope has also strongly criticized Church leaders who covered up or ignored reports of abuse made by survivors and family members. He is making it very clear that his focus is not just with the perpetrators of sexual abuse, but also how Church leadership around the world dealt with the scandal.

Ordinary Catholics struggle with and are disappointed in how the Church leadership both here and internationally has dealt with clerical sex abuse. It has taken too long for the Vatican to recognize that the systemic responsibility for managing child sex abuse needs a massive overhaul.

The Church leadership must demonstrate by their actions that there is no tolerance for past behaviours and past approaches. Pope Francis is leading the way by listening to survivors and taking action now and the same changes are well underway here in Australia

This week the Royal Commission announced the Archdiocese of Melbourne will be the focus of the next public hearing involving the Catholic Church starting in Melbourne on Monday 18 August and running for two weeks. This will be a significant moment for survivors of child sexual abuse in Melbourne and for the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The Melbourne hearing will look into the principles, practices and procedures of this victim's reparation scheme which pre-dated *Towards Healing* by a few months when it commenced in October 1996.

This will be a warts-and-all examination of what is arguably the first institutional redress scheme developed in Australia, perhaps the world, to address clerical child sexual abuse.

I was heartened to read [David Ellery's article](#) on Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Christopher Prowse. In the article Archbishop Prowse admits the sex abuse scandals in the Catholic Church have been 'a bit like an atomic bomb on faith', but believes survivors are the building block in rebuilding the Church.

Archbishop Prowse acknowledges the road to reconciliation is complex and challenging, but after working closely with survivors he has cause for hope.

"They speak, as it were, from the other side, after having been for many years working through the issues and facing it and correcting the church and then having their legitimate injustices addressed by the church. There is a light at the end of the tunnel I hope," Archbishop Prowse said.

Francis Sullivan

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