

Conference urges Churches to reform

by Stephen Cauchi

A CONFERENCE IN Melbourne has called on Australia's Churches to urgently reform their structures, governance and culture in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The three-day ecumenical Health and Integrity in Church and Ministry Conference tackled the task of rebuilding and renewal for the Churches after the Royal Commission.

Held on 27-29 August, the conference was hosted by the University of Divinity and sponsored by several leading Catholic religious institutes.

Church members and leaders, academics, clergy and religious, ministers and Church workers, survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates, and groups advocating Church reform all attended.

The conference heard of the grief and pain throughout Australian Churches as a result of the sexual abuse of children, and described the issue as a "national tragedy".

It expressed solidarity with the many thousands of men, women and children who had been harmed, and condemned the ongoing denial by some Church members of what has happened.

Churches are still often failing to respond to the needs of victims, their families, and communities, the conference heard.

The conference urged Australia's Churches to fully implement all of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Divinity, Professor Peter Sherlock, told the conference the university would take a number of measures.

One outcome would be the creation of a new goal in the university's strategic plan to pursue the dual themes of health and integrity in Church and ministry.

Emeritus Professor Des Cahill of RMIT University told the conference that the Royal Commission's final report was the most thorough and credible report that has ever been produced on the sexual abuse of children in religious institutions.

"Due to the Royal Commission's unparalleled moral authority, Australian governments are moving quickly to implement its recommendations," Professor Cahill said.

The conference called on Australia's Churches to exceed the minimum standards of implementation in the Royal Commission's recommendations, to undertake a thoroughgoing reform of theology, ministry, governance and leadership, and in so doing return to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ.

The conference further called on the Churches to engage in a process of theological and interdisciplinary reflection about the causes and implications of the child sexual abuse crisis, as an essential first step in the task of reform.

The Revd Professor Richard Lennan, an Australian priest who is Professor of Systematic Theology at Boston College in the United States, warned that any Church that proved unwilling or unable to learn the lessons of the Royal



Susan Pascoe AM.

Commission "will disqualify itself from a continuing place in Australian society".

Professor Lennan said the Royal Commission had brought distorted aspects of the Catholic Church's culture into relief. "When the Royal Commission defined clericalism as

ent and authentic body, the renewal of integrity in the Church requires more than individual pieces of reform: it requires broad and deep cultural shifts in the Church.

"To achieve this, it will be necessary for the Church to embrace an overarching approach to change".

Susan Pascoe AM, President and Chair of the Australian Council for International Development and Chair of the Community Director's Council, told the conference that although most of the Churches have signed up to the National Redress Scheme and many have issued apologies to victims, to date there has been limited public recognition by the Churches of the need for governance and cultural reform.

"Abuse survivors, many of whose lives have been irretrievably damaged, may take some convincing that genuine reform is on the way," Ms Pascoe said.

"Abuse survivors... may take some convincing that genuine reform is on the way."

the idealisation of the clergy, and by extension the idealisation of the Church, it was describing a form of idolatry," he said.

"Idols cannot ever give life; they can only be a distortion of what God enables," Professor Lennan said in his paper.

"While taking up the specific recommendations of the Royal Commission will certainly help the Church to become a more transpar-

Noting that "Basic Religious Charities" are exempted from meeting the reporting obligations and governance standards of other charities and non-for-profit organisations under the 2013 Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Act, Ms Pascoe said it was "reasonable to expect Church bodies to operate on comparable, or equal governance standards as corporate, government and not-for-profit

entities". She said they should also be subject to the same, or a comparable, regulatory regime.

The conference called on Australian Churches to initiate reform with the following principles:

- take responsibility for the lifelong care and support of victims, and ensure victims are not re-traumatised when they seek support and redress from the Church;
- reject clericalism in all its forms;

- commit to contemporary ethical standards of good governance based on the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusivity;

- ensure laity, and especially women, can take their rightful place in all aspects of Church life, including governance;

- participate fully in the national apology to victims of institutional child sexual abuse on 22 October 2018;

- consider instituting a shared National Day of Remembrance on the anniversary of the release of the Royal Commission's report on 15 December 2017, to ensure that the testimony of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse continues to be heard, and to be an occasion on which each Church reports publicly on its progress in implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations and in reforming its governance and culture.

The National Day of Remembrance should also be an occasion to "celebrate those righteous truth-tellers who refused to keep silent about the abuse and those who have worked in the interests of victims and child safety".

Church law – not celibacy – needs fixing, says scholar

by Stephen Cauchi

CHANGES IN canon law were "absolutely necessary" to deal with child sexual abuse – but the termination of celibacy was not, Belgian scholar Rik Torfs told the conference.

Furthermore, priests who abused minors should in some cases be retained by the Church, he said.

Professor Torfs, a leading canon law scholar and religious commentator in Europe, devoted his paper to the Royal Commission's recommendations for the Catholic Church.

However, his comments on canon law may be applicable to the wider Church, including the Anglican Church.

Among Professor Torfs' points:

- Compulsory celibacy was not the main reason for the "failure of the system".

"Power structures... including the clerical culture and the lack of independent jurisprudence have been more important contributors." Despite that, "with regard to compulsory celibacy, a refinement of the current legislation is highly recommendable".

Professor Torfs noted that in 1971 Pope Paul VI was "truly thinking" of lifting compulsory celibacy but did not do so for fear of ending tradition.



Professor Rik Torfs.

Abolishing celibacy did not mean it was meaningless, he said – just that it would be "optional". Compulsory celibacy, he said, would remain valuable for priests living in an abbey or monastery.

- Priests who were sex offenders should not be automatically sacked, as recommended by the Royal Commission. "There certainly is a difference between sexually abusing a young child and having one single sexual contact with a person who is close to 18," he said.

In lesser cases, "another solution" could be found – including banning the priest from contact with young

there may be a possibility of new abuse cases".

- Priests, unless they were offenders, should not be subject to excessive scrutiny. "Crimes that have to be avoided by all means cannot imply a strict control on everything priests do in their lives," he said.

Nevertheless, candidates should be "scrutinised very well" prior to ordination. But asking a candidate if they were gay was an illegitimate question, he said.

Furthermore, priests should not be left feeling alone. "I know of priests who have not been in touch with their diocesan bishop for over five or even 10 years," he said. "The feeling of loneliness may inspire priests to make unexpected decisions in their lives."

- The Royal Commission urged the removal of the time limit in which a sex abuse victim could file a complaint with the Church.

However, removal of the time limit was impractical, said Professor Torfs.

It meant that guilty priests would be "under a lifelong threat of punishment", he said. Furthermore, "the longer ago a fact took place, the more difficult it becomes to remember it properly".

If removal of the time limit was applied retroactively, guilty priests would "qualify for prosecution

again after a period of complete safety". This was incompatible with human rights and long traditions in penal law, he said.

Nevertheless, action could still be taken against such priests. Bishops could take "administrative" measures against the priest, invite them to pay damages, or request their resignation.

Removal of the time limit should not apply to victims seeking compensation "when the damage caused by the act can be proven", he said.

Removing time limits could only be carried out by the Vatican following a request from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

- The Royal Commission decided not to make recommendations for changes to canon law in Australia, but rather canon law from the Vatican (universal law). "This approach has both advantages and disadvantages," said Professor Torfs.

While "aiming at universal law is more effective", there were disadvantages also. "Achieving a change of universal law affecting the Catholic Church everywhere in the world will be a difficult and slow operation", he said.

"Probably the best way forward is insisting on giving more autonomy to local (Catholic) Churches in matters dealt with, up to now, exclusively at the universal level".

"There certainly is a difference between sexually abusing a young child and having one single sexual contact with a person who is close to 18."

Similarly, Pope Francis has suggested that married men might one day be ordained into the priesthood, he said.

"There is no divinely ordained reason for keeping norms with regard to celibacy the way they exist today."

people, or confining them to an administrative job.

Furthermore, retaining the priest meant that they could be supervised – usually by a bishop. A laicised priest "is completely free to do what he wants... he may be more dangerous to children and

Churches need a 'theology of the child'

by Muriel Porter

CHURCHES LACK A FULLY-developed theology of the child, despite Jesus' revolutionary attitude to little children, according to Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill.

Delivering the opening address at the Health and Integrity Conference in Melbourne, Professor Cahill, a former Roman Catholic priest, said that "each child, made in God's loving image, comes to us as mystery and as gift". Yet as the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse had pointed out, religious leaders as well as perpetrators "had no care for children and little psychosexual and emotional understanding of the child", he said.

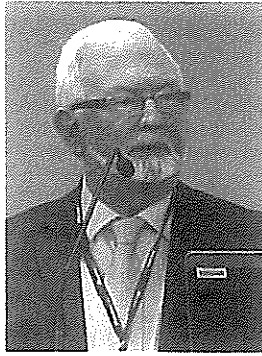
The conference, sponsored by the University of Divinity and major Roman Catholic religious orders and attended by 250 people, was an ecumenical conversation on the task of rebuilding and renewal after the Royal Commission.

Professor Cahill continued that for parents to have their "patient, time-consuming handiwork of rearing a child, damaged or even

destroyed by abusing clergy and religious" was "at the very core of this Christian tragedy". It was "further tragic that during all the cultural, theological and pastoral wars in the Christian Churches since World War Two, thousands of children worldwide were being physically and sexually abused".

Professor Cahill warned that the "veil of secrecy" about child sexual abuse had not yet been lifted in parts of Asia and Africa where Australian religious institutions had outreach. "It is sobering to think that on this very day it is likely that children will be abused in Catholic and other Christian child residential centres around the world," he said. Australian religious leaders had a heavy responsibility to ensure that Asian and African Churches protected children.

He praised the Royal Commission for its report, describing it as the "most thorough and most credible report on religious institutional sexual abuse of children ever produced". He noted that its "unparalleled moral authority" meant that Governments were accepting its 495 recommendations, including restrictions on the seal of



Professor Desmond Cahill.

"With the Catholics, the Australian barque of Peter has become a shipwreck."

the confessional. It was notable, he said, "how little public resistance there has been on the issue".

But while the Anglican Church had moved on mandatory reporting of confessional material, the Australian Catholic bishops had

"showed a distinct lack of imagination on the issue", he said. They could have made child sexual abuse a "reserved sin" where only the bishop could give absolution, he said, or made absolution dependent on the penitent reporting to criminal justice authorities. He also criticised the bishops for taking almost nine months to make a formal response to the Commission's report. This could only be described as "appalling and abysmal". "With the Catholics, the Australian barque of Peter has become a shipwreck," he said.

Deep cultural change was needed in all the Churches, he

"the lack of understanding or awareness of child sexual abuse, the failure to listen to children, the failure to educate children about healthy and appropriate sexual development, the cultivation of secrecy over isolation and the failure to see child protection as a shared responsibility".

The Catholic Church also needed to "re-vision" its theology of gender and sexuality "around relationality, mutuality and reciprocity, not gender complementarity", he said. It would be women who would save the Catholic Church, which had no choice but to finally "grasp the nettle and include women in its decision-making processes and in priestly ministry". Women priests, bishops and now archbishops in the Anglican Church had "greatly diminished Anglican clericalism," he said.

What all the Christian Churches needed now was not "a resurrected traditionalism but flair, innovation and imagination to plan and implement transformational tasks", he concluded.

See 'Sex. We need to talk about it' on page 20.

Catholic Church's attitude to sex 'dehumanising', 'dysfunctional'

by Stephen Cauchi

THE CATHOLIC Church's attitude to sex has contributed to child sex abuse and had a dehumanising effect on priests, a Catholic psychologist told the conference.

And there was "faint unease" within the Catholic Church of adopting professional supervision of priests, as recommended by the Royal Commission.

Sydney-based psychologist Janiene Wilson told the conference that the "problem of sexual dysfunction among Catholic clergy has been known about for ages," she said.

"The priestly formation system... that sees sex as problematic at best and sinful at worst has been dehumanising and deforming of the humanity of individual men."

In some cases, she said, "there is such stark sexual immaturity and undeveloped personal awareness that some sort of sexual acting out is almost inevitable".

The acting out can involve



Psychologist Janiene Wilson.

another who has less personal power, she said, "be that a child or a woman or in some cases other men who do not pose a personal threat".

"Power is the compensation for living a life that is without physical affection, sexual intimacy or parenthood."

Priests who were sexually abused as young men were at risk of acting out that behaviour, she said.

"Power is the compensation for living a life that is without physical affection, sexual intimacy or parenthood."

Similarly, "discouraged or shamed sexual exploration of early adolescence" sometimes affected "less thoughtful" priests.

This could result in "rage which is then unleashed sexually on a weaker human being".

Ms Wilson, who started working at the St Patrick's Archdiocesan Seminary in Sydney in 1993, said she had observed a number of problems in the Catholic system of training priests.

Firstly, current training to prepare for celibacy was inadequate.

She said that when she started at St Patrick's, there was no program dealing with celibacy. Typically, seminarians suffered from "unresolved psycho-sexual immaturity".

"As a sexual orientation, (celibacy) requires the hard work of self-knowledge, but... current (priestly) formation does not, and cannot, encourage this level of personal exploration."

Gay clergy faced special challenges, she said. The "real demands of life in middle age" often forced a crisis that "often happens at others' expense and with disastrous consequences for all concerned".

Having said that, "it is clear that the Catholic priesthood has within its ranks many, many good pastors who are gay".

Additionally, those entering seminary often had their idealism compromised by the need for approval of their superiors.

"I have witnessed students enter the Seminary with energy and per-

sonality and leave after seven years angry, blunted and diminished," she said.

"Sometimes it appears they are more concerned with maintaining Church stability than sensitivity to human pain and suffering."

Ms Wilson said she was not surprised that one of the recommendations for the Royal Commission was that clergy would avail themselves of professional supervision.

Such an idea was "long overdue", she said.

But Ms Wilson said there was "faint unease" with the idea within Catholic clergy, although some have welcomed the idea. However, many Catholic clergy would resist the idea of being supervised by anyone other than a bishop or a senior priest, she said.

Unfortunately, supervision by a bishop or another priest – the current accountability structure – clearly does not work, she said.

The exact model of the supervision was "clearly outside the scope of this paper," she said.

Clergy supervision urgently required, says Stirling's director of research

by Stephen Cauchi

SUPERVISION OF clergy – a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – had been in "huge deficit" in the past and needed to be urgently fixed, the director of research at Stirling Theological College told the conference.

"This huge deficit has been a reality historically and maybe, notwithstanding the shock behind why we're here today, also in the future. I hope not," said Alan Niven, who is also a Churches of Christ minister.

Dr Niven, who has supervised priests and ministers for over 20 years, said he had heard many reasons from clergy as to why they were not being supervised.

These included: "never really considered it", "(I'm) programmed to keep going no matter what", "costs too much, don't have time" and "not enough good supervisors".

Dr Niven said that theological colleges were "key partners" in training supervisors of clergy.

"My own belief is that the Church could... not [survive] without theological education and pastoral/spiritual formation

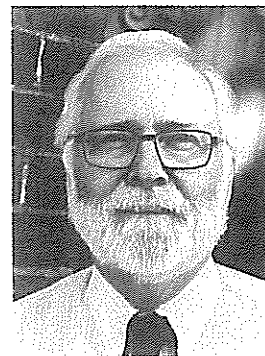
and pastoral supervision."

He described professional pastoral supervision as "a relationship characterised by trust, confidentiality, support and openness that gives the supervisee freedom and safety to explore the issues arising in their work".

Courses in supervision, such as the graduate diploma in supervision, were currently offered by a number of institutions including the University of Divinity in Melbourne.

Dr Niven said that supervisors needed to meet several minimum requirements.

They should have five years'



Dr Alan Niven.

minimum experience in a relevant field; 50 hours' face-to-face training in professional supervision; evidence of supervision practice of 200 hours; evaluation reports from their teacher; and self-evaluation reports.

Despite the historical shortcomings, the Church was "already doing some good work" in the area of supervision, he said.

"Firstly, let's... evaluate and improve existing work and secondly, set up culturally and demographically diverse pilot (schemes) to help us understand where to go."