

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Case Study 50

7 February 2017

The second day of the Royal Commission's Catholic "wrap up" hearing was held today in Sydney. The Commission today heard from Father Thomas Doyle OP, a US Priest with significant experience in the Church's handling of child sexual abuse, Dr Michelle Mulvihill, psychologist and former Sister of Mercy, Professor Neil James Ormerod, Professor of Theology at ACU and Father Francis Maloney SDB, Senior Professorial Fellow at College of Divinity, Victoria.

Testimony of Father Thomas Doyle OP

Background

Father Doyle spoke about his studies and his work as a staff canon lawyer within the Papal Nuncio's office in Washington DC, including his role in assisting the selection of Bishops.

Father Doyle went into some detail about his first encounter with child sexual abuse and its cover up. He spoke of local police contacting the office in 1982 to say that a retired Bishop had been caught with a couple of teenage boys, but they would cover it up. He went on to reoffend. He also said that they were contacted by another man who said that a Priest rumoured to be a nominee for Bishop had abused his wife's nephew, and so the nomination was withdrawn.

He explained that the issue came to a head in the mid 1980s, when the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana informed them that they had entered into confidential settlements with a number of families, and that another was planning to sue the Diocese. Father Doyle wrote a report for the Pope, and a Bishop was appointed to investigate the matter, but Father Doyle said the Bishop was only interested in avoiding the scandal.

Working with victims and families

Father Doyle told he had met countless victims, ranging in ages between 10 and 91 years of age. He said that the biggest learning he has received from survivors is that the Church still does not understand the "profound spiritual damage" done to survivors and their families. He said that while a lot of Priests and religious try to address the damage individually, there is still a lack of it being addressed on an institutional level.

Father Doyle is also a consultant to the [Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors](#). He said that he does not believe the key issue to be the protection of minors today and tomorrow, because the Church can do that and punish those who fail in this respect. He said that the more important task was the pastoral care and support and love of the hundreds of thousands who have been violated physically and spiritually over the years.

Causes

Father Doyle said that the teaching that the Church as we know it was started by Jesus Christ did not have a basis in Church history, but commented that this teaching caused the Church to be viewed as "sacrosanct," and the sole way to achieve eternal salvation. This, he said, encouraged a culture of deference and a need to protect the reputation of the Church and the clergy, which resulted in

children being afraid to complain about Priests, parents reluctant to report and judges unwilling to convict.

He also said that while he believed celibacy was not a cause in itself, it is seen as a “higher” call, which means that it functions as another way to set a man apart from the community.

Gratitude to the Commission

Father Doyle expressed his gratitude to the Commission, calling its work unique and historic.

Dr Michelle Mulvihill, psychologist and former Sister of Mercy
Professor Neil James Ormerod, Professor of Theology at the Australian Catholic University
Professor (Fr) Francis Maloney SDB, Senior Professorial Fellow at Catholic Theological College

Background

Dr Mulvihill worked solely for the St John of God Brothers between 1998 and 2006, but resigned because of what she described as corruption and systemic abuse. She

Prior to ACU, Professor Ormerod was at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, the Centre for Christian Spirituality, and St Paul’s National Seminary. He said that he found out that his wife, as an adult, was sexually exploited by a Priest.

Father Francis Moloney SDB spoke about his time as the Provincial of the Salesians, a role he took up after his predecessor had a nervous breakdown. He told the Commission about how he addressed the issue, making sure he met with survivors, and was more aggressive in the elimination of perpetrators and the provision of unconditional support to their victims.

He spoke about the process of removing a Priest from ministry, and said while faculties could be (and were) removed quickly, the process of laicisation was more difficult, because it required the approval of the Vatican, and there was a reluctance to laicise.

Causes

All were asked about what they believed the causes of abuse were.

Father Moloney suggested that men with underlying paedophilic tendencies might have unconsciously been attracted to an order with close connection with children. He also said that the formation on celibacy was poor, because it was taken for granted that a person who wanted to be a Priest wanted to do good in the world.

Professor Ormerod suggested that there was something sexually attractive about vulnerability, which explained the high rates of abuse in the orders focussed on care.

These explanations were vehemently rejected by Dr Mulvihill. She said the problems were the seeking of power and a misogynistic culture. She called for compulsory registration of all Church workers, clerical and lay.

Ways to improve

Professor Ormerod said that the lowest rate of offending was in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, and suggested the reason could be that Archbishop Leonard Faulkner (who was Archbishop from 1985 to 2001) appointed a pastoral team which included women, instead of an auxiliary Bishop.

He also spoke of the need for ongoing formation and pastoral supervision for clergy, commenting that the [Integrity in Ministry](#) document requires this, and it was also confirmed by the Holy See in a statement of conclusions relating to Australia.

Criticism of modern seminaries

At the end of the hearing, Father Moloney and Professor Ormerod spent some time criticising recent developments in seminary formation. Father Moloney said that the seminaries were “closing their doors” and returning to a pre-Vatican II form of clericalism which involved the wearing of soutanes and the use of Latin in the liturgy. Professor Ormerod commented on a change he saw in students he was teaching, who began to care more about piety than studies. The seminary formation in Sydney was singled out for specific criticism.

The hearing will continue tomorrow.