

S: Hello everyone. Cardinal Pell I understand would like to make a statement or share a couple of words with you and then, as I said, he's open to some questions. Thank you.

S: Good. Well, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming so that we can talk about this enormously important topic and very painful topic. The Catholic Bishops of Australia have welcomed the Royal Commission, which was announced by the Prime Minister last night. We think it's an opportunity to help the victims; it's an opportunity to clear the air and to separate fact from fiction. The first thing I would like to do is to repeat what I and the church leadership have said for the last 16 years, which is that we are not interested in denying the extent of misdoing in the Catholic Church. We object to it being exaggerated, we object to being described as the only cab on the rank, we acknowledge, with shame, the extent of the problem and I want to assure you that we have been serious in attempting to eradicate it and deal with it and one of the reasons why we welcome the Royal Commission is that this commission will enable those claims to be validated or found to be a significant exaggeration.

Obviously we shall co-operate with the Royal Commission, we'll co-operate fully. I, not surprisingly, I'm delighted that the victims have welcomed this Royal Commission. I hope it will bring them some peace; that they'll feel that justice has been done. One question I think that might asked is just to what extent the victims are helped by a continuing furore in the press over these allegations. The pursuit of justice is an absolute entitlement for everyone. That being said to what extent are wounds simply opened by the re-running of events which have been reported not only once but many times previously.

Someone asked this morning in our press office about the role of a cardinal and my position in the Catholic Church. The cardinal is not a scriptural term like bishop or prespitor, whether we say priest is a scriptural term is a bit disputed. It's got a history though, a cardinal, of over a thousand years. A cardinal is an official of the Church of Rome, the geographical Church of Rome, which is headed by the successor of Peter the Pope, so for example I have a church in Rome as a cardinal. A cardinal is an

advisor to the pope and our biggest role is that we elect the new pope. It does not give me any extra jurisdiction in Australia or canonical authority but I do have a moral authority which I try to ... I acknowledge and on occasion I've used to the discomfort of some and the comfort of others.

The procedures ... we follow the Towards Healing procedures here in Sydney. These were set in place, I think these, in early '97, they've been twice reviewed by Professor Parkinson, one of the leading authorities in the area; earlier this year we put out this booklet detailing how we deal with sexual abuse in the archdiocese of Sydney. I have brought extra copies, I'm not sure we have quite enough for everybody here but we ... there are many copies and I'd ask you to take one just to demonstrate what we are doing and what are the protocols and since 1997 one of the significant protocols that's in place is that it's completely prohibited to shift priests who have been charged, to shift them around. If and where that's been done that is against the protocols.

I think a final point, quite a number of historic events have been investigated, that's entirely appropriate. I think another question that might be asked is whether the police have adequate resources to deal with the actual problems that are happening today. I think that's an important issue, that's one of the reasons we asked for the statistics to be provided. One, because we can compare past and present and secondly I think those statistics will certainly show that the only community that is or has produced culprits is not just the Catholic Church or the Christian communities nor just the non-government communities so I'm happy to take questions.

F: Cardinal Pell.

S: I'll have a glass of water, thanks, [unclear]. Certainly.

F: Emma Alberici from ABC Lateline.

S: Good, Emma.

F: I'm interested, you just mentioned then about the statistics, do people you, you being the church, have paid in compensation, do they show up in the statistics, given those matters never make it to the courts?

S: I would suggest, one, I don't know how many of those matters never make it to the courts, I do know that in New South Wales there is an obligation to report these matters to the police, which we have followed scrupulously since 1997 and obviously therefore they would be in the statistics.

F: But pre-1997 they wouldn't be?

S: Well I don't think there's any obligation in New South Wales to report allegations to the police before ... I think that came in in the early '90s, but you can check that.

F: No, I'm suggesting that there is an understanding that in the past certainly compensation was paid by the church in the hope that victims would not pursue their claims through the courts.

S: I'm not sure that's correct, I'm not sure from what time the compensation was paid, I've never been involved in any case where people have been offered money so they wouldn't go through the courts.

F: Wasn't the Melbourne response that you orchestrated and you made people sign things so that they wouldn't go to the courts?

S: Could I say a word about the Melbourne response? I didn't orchestrate it. In 1996 I was appointed Archbishop of Melbourne. Soon afterwards, I can't remember whether I asked or the premier asked to see me but whatever we met together and Prime Minister Jeff Kennett said to me clean it up, clean it up and I said I'm prepared to do so and I said the governor was just speaking to me and the governor said why don't you appoint a Catholic Royal Commissioner and give him power, give him independence, a senior person, let him deal with those things and we did that and we called that the Independent Commissioner, that was set up after consultation with the police and the Solicitor-General.

I know a lot of young reporters wouldn't remember that because it was back in '96, for quite a few years it was very, very well regarded. I know the senior leadership on both sides of parliament said I think this is something that is working well. I gather that in legal documents, when there is a settlement, it's not unusual for the amount of the settlement ... confidentiality to be asked for on that, I'm not quite sure what was done originally in terms of not saying anything about the general issue, certainly that's not the case now and certainly anybody who has received compensation and has gone public has never been pursued.

F: Can you tell us what ...

M: Cardinal Pell ...

F: A few years ago I was sitting in a press conference with you about very similar things to this. You were fighting your own personal claims that a 12-year-old boy said that you had abused him and you said at the time they were lies and it was proven to be lies. Did that colour your approach, future approach, to people making claims? That you had had someone put a claim against you which were lies?

S: We didn't make any changes in the procedures as a result of that. I am sensitive to the justice for every person involved, every person involved has a right to justice but we made no changes in the procedures precisely because of that. I don't in fact set the Towards Healing procedures, although I comment on them.

F: Can you tell me ...

M: Cardinal Pell, now that the ...

F: ... about police resources though being ...

M: ... Royal Commission is going ahead is it a reasonable thing for Catholics to expect, and in fact the wider public to expect, that the Royal Commission would take

a look at Towards Healing, there's been consistent ... there's been a lot of criticism of it from victims, and make an independent assessment of how well it's working and perhaps indeed compare it to the system that was set up in Melbourne and make an assessment about which has worked better?

S: I'm sure they will do that. We would welcome that. We're quite open to introducing further improvements and refinements. I have said publicly, I think both procedures are adequate, now that doesn't mean to say they haven't ... they've been mucked up, they're adequate if they are followed.

M: Cardinal Pell ...

F: Cardinal Pell, can you tell us what the protocol is now in the Catholic Church for priests that might confess to another priest of abuse?

S: If that is done outside the confessional?

F: No, if it's done in the confessional.

S: Well, you know the answer to that as well as I. The seal of ...

F: I want you to articulate it.

S: The seal of confession is inviolable.

F: So if a priest confesses to another priest that he has abused a child ...

S: The seal of confession is inviolable ...

M: Could I put that ...

S: ... for murders ...

M: Could I put that question a slightly different way?

S: Mm-hm.

M: What would your advice be to the priest receiving confession from a priest who has a confession like that to offer? Should such a priest hear that confession?

S: If the ...

M: Or should they refuse to hear that confession?

S: That is a good question. If the priest knows beforehand about such a situation the priest should refuse to hear the confession.

F: What's the advice then?

S: I would never ... that's my ... would be my advice, and I would never hear the confession of a priest who was suspected of such a thing.

F: What would the advice be to a priest confessing to such a crime by the priest hearing the confession?

S: That would depend on the priest; I would hope that he would recommend that the law of the country be followed.

M: Cardinal Pell ...

F: Cardinal Pell ...

M: Cardinal Pell, is it not an indictment that on the church, the Catholic Church, that you've had to have this Royal Commission in the first place?

S: Well one of the good things about this Royal Commission is it doesn't focus exclusively on us. I don't think we should be scapegoated. We'll answer for what we've done for ... what we've done, we're not trying to defend the indefensible, but let's ... right across the board let's see. The ...

M: There's a persistent theme in this that over the last few years and even last week, even today ...

S: That ... yes.

M: ... when the Catholic Church is mentioned there's always this theme of a cover up.

S: Well you see we have been unable to convince public opinion that for basically the last 20 years whatever the imperfections in individual cases we've been serious about this. Now I think what is important for the press and the public to realise that because there is a persistent press campaign against the Catholic Church's adequacies and inadequacies in this area that does not necessarily represent the percentage of the problem that we offer.

F: Cardinal Pell ...

S: In other words that because there's a press campaign focused largely on us it does not mean that we are largely the principle culprit.

M: But don't you think, Cardinal Pell, that the very reason there is this so called campaign is that the church hasn't adequately addressed these issues properly?

S: I have just been attempting to explain that for the last 16 to 20 years we have addressed these adequate procedures, these have been out for months, nobody has written to me saying this procedure is inadequate or that procedure is inadequate, what we have had is general smears like, with due respect, I suggest you are making that it's generally inefficient, that we're covering up, we're moving people around, where that is done it's against the protocols.

M: But is that why over the weekend you weren't convinced that there was a need for a Royal Commission?

S: I remain unconvinced that there was a need for a Royal Commission exclusively for the Catholic Church, what I was saying then was that if people had allegations take them to the police and get them tested. Now a public feeling has built up, I welcome, we'll certainly co-operate with this Royal Commission, and I'm pleased it's right across the board and I would welcome the release of the statistics, which are available, showing for ... showing the number of cases the police are dealing with, how many of them might involve Catholic teachers, priests or brothers, how many of these incidents are historical incidents, how many of them are happening today and I'm interested in asking whether the police have sufficient resources to deal with the day-to-day problems rather as well as the historical.

M: So when you ...

F: Cardinal Pell, do you expect to be personally questioned by the Royal Commission over past accusations that you have covered up, I know you've answered these publicly before but at a Royal Commission presumably they'll be explored won't they?

S: Yeah, I should hope so and if there are any particular ... if ... it's one thing to say I've covered up, it's another thing to give you know the here and now and I don't think that's been done much at all. There was a recent allegation that I covered up in the Hunter area, got no authority there, I've only been to the area two or three times, I never approached any politician or police official on the matter and I wouldn't dream of ...

F: Cardinal Pell, you talk about ...

F: Cardinal Pell ...

M: Sorry, we just can't ... [unclear] one.

F: Thank you, Cardinal Pell, Leigh Sales from the 7.30 Program.

S: Good.

F: On the question of this cover up I wanted to run through a few examples with you.

S: Mm-hm.

F: In 1993 you accompanied to court a priest who was a confessed paedophile and was then convicted, around the same time that same priest's nephew told you that he'd been abused by his uncle and accused you of offering him hush money, something that you have denied.

S: Mm-hm.

F: This year you denied that a priest called Father F admitted to three other priests that he was a paedophile back in 1992, court testimony and other documents contradict that, and an investigation into the Catholic Church in Victoria currently underway has heard testimony that you were accused of being present in the 1960s when a boy described his sexual assault at the hands of a priest, something you've also denied. Can you understand, with a collection like that, why there is public cynicism around these matters?

S: Well I think those things need to be taken in turn and that's one reason why I'm very concerned for proper justice. Now on the first case when I had accompanied Ridsdale to the court his lawyers wanted me to appear in the court. I said I would only do that on the condition that I would say I don't dispute the allegations, I don't dispute the good faith of the victims, all I would say is that Ridsdale has done other good things. Now at that stage none of us, or at least I had, no idea of the enormity of and the number of Ridsdale's crimes and ...

F: You knew there was some though?

S: Well obviously, he'd been charged.

F: So why did you accompany him to court?

S: As a priestly act of solidarity. I ... in retrospect I didn't realise then what a wrong impression it would give to the victims. Now the second example ...

F: Did you offer his nephew hush money?

S: No, I certainly didn't offer his nephew hush money. I ...

F: Did you take his nephew's claims to the police?

S: No, I think ... no, I didn't, I was under the impression they'd already gone, he certainly did go to the police, I certainly did offer to help him, there was ... in retrospect I probably wouldn't do that now, that was ... I'd known the lad, I was entirely sympathetic towards him, I never had any intention of trying to shut him up and I never suggested that and he certainly never said I'm going to the police or I have been to the police and I said well, don't do that let me ... there was nothing like that and the third ...

F: How about the case of Father F who testified in court, under oath, that he had abused boys and that he had told three priests about that, in the early '90s, yet he remained a priest until 2005?

S: Well this is one ... I wasn't ... this was the recent television, now I was not present at that interview, I was ... what I said on the television was what I told about that interview, that was my understanding that it was correct, this is the subject of an investigation by Judge Whitlam and who will announce his findings probably before the end of the year and then we will see just what was said at that meeting. What I do

know is that that priest was stood down in 1992, 1992 he was prevented from working as a priest from that date.

F: How many suicides are connected to him?

S: To McAlinden?

F: Father F.

F: No, we're talking about Father F?

S: I'm sorry I don't know.

F: Aren't there two or three lives gone from Father F?

S: I simply don't know.

F: To return to my original question, Cardinal Pell, can you understand how those sorts of things have given rise to a public cynicism that the church is doing enough?

S: I don't think there is a widespread public cynicism, there's certainly a cynicism in elements of the press, in elements of the public, I don't think it's widespread, I think the general public certainly understands that we're serious about this.

F: Excuse me ...

F: Allegations and claims like this have been around for a long time, why do you ... what do you put it down to, the rising of so much now in the last few weeks and months?

S: Well I mean that is an interesting question, why issues are run and re-run and re-run. I think others can answer why that is the case. I certainly very much regret the general smearing, I might say, the church is covering up, the church has done nothing, the ... because that's not the case, it's demonstrably not the case. We have these procedures, we're following them and a lot of priests ...

M: Would you be confident that there are no cover ups now in the clergy? I mean you acknowledge that they have happened but you say they're historical, what makes you confident that it's still not going on?

S: Because we have ... well I can't be absolutely sure, I'd be very confident that it's not general and one reason is because of our education programs, because we've been getting out into all our parishes and schools that these are the procedures to follow, that there is an obligation to inform police of allegations and that people should do that.

F: How can the Royal Commission do its job if priests won't be able to disclose everything they know because of the confessional?



S: The Royal Commission will certainly be able to do its job and I wouldn't anticipate that any victim would hide behind confessional.

M: Cardinal Pell ...

F: Cardinal Pell, you talk ...

M: ... what's your ...

M: Can we go to the back a bit, go to the back.

M: Cardinal Pell, what's your reaction to the charging by New South Wales police today of a former Catholic teacher and Catholic brother with a host of sex crimes to date?

S: Very sad, I apologise to the victims.

F: Well, Cardinal Pell, I can add something to that because I've spoken to four of the victims personally, one of whom is a very senior New South Wales policeman who tells me that 18 months ago he visited a senior member of the clergy in Parramatta and told him what had happened to him. Now I can also tell you that that brother, right up until this morning, is still listed on the Patrician Brothers website, Patrician Brothers Blacktown, as a serving member of that school. In fact, on the broader Patrician Brothers website he's listed as a community leader. Now 18 months ago this very credible witness, being a senior detective himself, went to the senior clergy and revealed what had happened to him.

S: Well what I ... one, I'm not completely over this situation, what I would imagine has happened is that that would have been reported to the police, the police would have been ... I've been told the police were investigating that since I think late last year ...

F: Eighteen months ago.

S: No, I don't know when the police started their investigation, if they started it 18 months ago, when a police investigation starts we have to get right out of it, we can't interfere in any way. I gather ...

F: Not even standing down the ...

S: I gather the ...

F: ... brother?

S: ... that the brother has been stood down from duties for quite some time, possibly from the start of this year, but you'd need to check that with the appropriate authority.

M: Cardinal Pell, you've mentioned that this Royal Commission will take in not only the Catholic Church but other churches, other community groups, the arts movement, etc.

S: And government institutions.

M: How long would you expect a commission of that scope to take? It would last for years wouldn't it?

S: I'd imagine so, the Royal ... did the Wood Royal Commission we had here in Sydney that lasted for quite a few years.

M: Got one more down the back here I think.

S: Yes?

F: Cardinal Pell, this latest Royal Commission was ... seemed to be sparked by claims by Detective Chief Inspector Peter Fox, do you see his claims of cover up as part of the general smear against the church?

S: Well I ... Fox wants the truth on this matter, so do I. I'd like to think we're heading in the same direction. Where I think he's unjustified is if ... I mean he's encountered cover-ups, it's important to know when they occurred and the extent to which they occurred. I don't think there is sufficient evidence for him to say because of the particular problems he faced at this time or that time that the church generally is covering up because we're not.

F: Cardinal Pell, just to be absolutely clear, will you appear yourself before the Royal Commission if you are called?

S: I will do whatever, like every other Catholic priest or bishop, I comply with the law of the land and will co-operate fully and I ... we've got nothing we want to hide.

F: And will you lift confidentiality agreements for people who've already struck settlements with the Catholic Church so they can testify?

S: I'm not sure how many of those that exist in this part of the world at all. People are free to say what they want and that's the way it's worked ...

F: So people aren't bound by confidentiality agreements they've signed in the past?

S: I don't know anything, I ... as far as I was concerned there'd be no problem for me, if they're with other people they'll have to answer.

F: Cardinal Pell ...

M: Just about out of time.

F: ... is this, the call of the Royal Commission, one of the darkest or lightest days for the Catholic Church here?

S: It's neither, I think it's a welcome day because it will I think enable us ... people don't believe, or a percentage as I said, don't believe that we've been serious. I believe this will give us an opportunity to show how ever imperfect it might have been in certain cases for many years we have consistently tried to do the right thing with basically appropriate procedures if those procedures are followed.

F: Cardinal Pell ...

M: Okay, thanks everybody. Thanks very much.

F: Can you just tell us if you've spoken to the pope, given you told us you're his advisor, have you spoken to him about this in the last 24 hours?

S: No, certainly not.

M: Or Mr Abbott?

S: I have spoken with Abbott over the last few days; I've spoken to the prime minister too.

M: What did you say to the prime minister when she called yesterday?

M: I think ...

S: I ... she just called me up to tell me what she was going to do, she said this wasn't an anti-Catholic move but more general and I said I acknowledged that, I said I wasn't surprised that it wasn't anti-Catholic and I was grateful.

F: Cardinal Pell ...

M: Thank you everybody for that. The abuse documents are here ...

F: ... the experiences of the church changed ...

M: ... and available.

F: ... the dedication of new priests?

M: I'm sorry, the Cardinal has another meeting. Thank you very much. Sorry, thank you very much for your attendance, here's the abuse ... the documents and procedures in Sydney are here. Thank you for attending.

End of recording