

Extended Review by Peter Johnstone:

**'A *Question of Conscience*' by Fr Tony Flannery CSsR**

Published by Londubh Books, Dublin, 2013

Fr Tony Flannery shares the story of his unjust removal from ministry as a Catholic priest, involving unjust and unchristian decision-making by the leaders of the Church established by Christ. Fr Flannery has clearly questioned his conscience in his behaviour, at all times informed by the teachings of Christ. Those very teachings were not reflected in the Curia's dealings with him and indeed condemn the Church practices of injustice, secrecy and lack of accountability that permeate the treatment of Fr Flannery.

A trusting and loyal Redemptorist priest leading missions to Irish communities, he managed to upset the Roman Curia with statements that were hardly newsworthy. The Curia proceeded to use high-handed and intimidatory tactics in attempting to force him to recant for their own obscure purposes, hardly the pastoral approach endorsed by Pope Francis. Fr Flannery was clearly denied natural justice in being forced out of ministry but showed great courage in patiently seeking to understand and to comply where he could, while refusing to be bullied.

This book is very important in illustrating how dysfunctional the governance of the institutional Catholic Church has become, a matter of which many Catholics are trustingly unaware. The book describes practices of the Roman Curia that would not be tolerated in any modern democratic society.

The response to this, despite Fr Flannery's understandable despondency, should not involve a crisis of faith for followers of Christ; rather, despite many welcome initiatives by Pope Francis, we have a crisis in leadership of the institutional Church that is threatening its very existence, and is reflected in the dramatic increase in the official figures of those alienated from the Church. Fr Flannery's experience is very similar to that

of some Australian clergy, including Bishop Morris in his removal as bishop of the Diocese of Toowoomba, another example of injustice and autocratic behaviour that would not be tolerated in the secular world.

The Church needs the often-inspiring words of Pope Francis to be reflected in its practices. We also need those words to be reflected in the decisions of the Curia. We need Fr Flannery and all Catholics to continue to demand Christ-like leadership and governance of our Church, the Church of the People of God.

Tony Flannery has done the Church a great service in his exposure of its grave failings - leadership and governance without accountability or transparency, excluding women from their necessary contribution to the Church's life, the cover-up of the sexual abuse of children involving further institutional abuse by the Church, and much more. We people of the Church now have a heavy responsibility to ensure thorough reform. Fr Flannery's book contributes valuable understanding of the Church's dysfunctional governance, which must be reformed to properly reflect the teachings of Jesus.

*Peter Johnstone, Catholics for Renewal, Australia. 10 January 2015*