

Catholics For Renewal Inc.

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Historic report withheld - Australian Bishops regress to ‘business as usual’

A new ‘historic’, ‘substantial’, and ‘comprehensive’ report on Catholic Church governance *The Light of the Southern Cross* was handed to the Australian bishops on 4th May 2020. It will have ‘far-reaching implications for the Church’s life and mission’.

The report recommends a ‘new paradigm’ for church governance in Australia with key principles of transparency, accountability, dialogue and leadership. But the decision of the bishops at their May 7-14 plenary meeting to lock the report away in secret until December is simply ‘business as usual’.

Catholics for Renewal, whose award-winning book [*Getting Back on Mission: Reforming our Church Together*](#) made substantial recommendations on church governance, believes this 6-month delay in making the report available is unhelpful, indefensible and unacceptable.

“This groundbreaking report”, says Dr Peter Wilkinson, President of Catholics for Renewal, “was commissioned and prepared on a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. If Australia’s bishops are to honour their commitment to the Royal Commission they should make the report public at least by June 2020.”

“It belongs to all the People of God,” says Wilkinson, “not just to the bishops and religious orders. We have a right to see it without undue delay.”

World renowned theologian, Professor Massimo Faggioli, who consulted on the report’s preparation, says that “this report could become an example of how a local Church can go about reforming its governance structure” and “will be studied for many years to come by theologians, historians, canon lawyers, and all those interested in connecting spiritual and institutional reform of the Church.”

Dr Wilkinson says, “I would expect that it recommends replacing secrecy, obfuscation and delaying tactics with transparency; replacing PR spin and cover-ups with accountability; replacing authoritarian decision-making with dialogue and co-responsibility; and replacing Rome-referencing with local responsibility. That will be the paradigm shift.”

Catholics for Renewal notes that the bishops have said they will conduct discussions on the report effectively at a state level. “That is a good thing,” says Wilkinson, “but it has to involve open and public dialogue with people in the pews, and out of the pews in the dioceses, after they have had the opportunity to read it.”

“The time of bishops making decisions without consulting their people is over”, says Dr Wilkinson, “‘business as usual’ has to end now.”

Contacts:

Dr Peter Wilkinson, President, Catholics for Renewal: pjw52@bigpond.com or 0467 014 077
Dr Gail Grossman Freyne, Vice-President, Catholics for Renewal: gcfreyne@eircom.net or 0450 388 115