

The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Sexual Abuse handed down its report on 13 November, 2013. The full report can be accessed through the Victorian Parliament's home page <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au>

The Report is damning of the institutional Catholic Church's handling of clerical sexual abuse of children. Committee members, in introducing the report, were scathing of the Church. Andrea Coote MP told the ABC's 7.30 Report:

"A sliding morality has developed within the Catholic Church which emphasises the interests of the perpetrator and the Church. The Catholic Church appears to have compartmentalised the issues in order to avoid the obvious moral conflicts."

The Report states (page 170). *"No representatives of the Catholic Church directly reported the criminal conduct of its members to the police. The Committee found that there is simply no justification for this position."*

Catholics for Renewal seeks the renewal of the institutional Church in the likeness of Christ, in keeping with our duty as members of the Church. Catholics for Renewal is particularly concerned, as reported by the Parliamentary Committee, that the institutional Church is not accountable and not transparent. This dysfunctional governance was demonstrated tragically in the Church's cover-up and aggravation of clerical sexual abuse, followed by strong resistance to public demands for transparency. Of course, such a gross deficiency in governance impacts on Catholics in many other areas and has alienated many from the Church.

The Parliamentary Committee addressed the issues raised by Catholics for Renewal Inc's submissions and presentation, in particular the need for mandatory (non-discretionary) criminal reporting of child abuse, a position resisted by the Church. Our detailed submission is at <http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/documents.htm>. In particular, the Parliamentary Report notes:

"The internal structure and culture of organisations (bolding added) *can influence the level of risk that personnel could criminally abuse children in their care, and organisations must actively seek to address those risks."*

The Report observes:

“Analysis of the Catholic Church’s past handling of this problem shows that as an organisation it had many of the internal features of an organisation at high risk of its personnel perpetrating criminal child abuse, (including) . . . :

- *culture and power*
- *complex hierarchy and structure . . .”*

The failure of the Church to conduct a full and systemic internal investigation of its culture and structures in the context of the sexual abuse scandal is indicative of the dysfunctional governance standards of the institutional Church, which continues to deny that such a full and systemic internal investigation is desirable, let alone recognise that it is an essential first step to identify the necessary changes to Church culture, structures and protocols. This is a matter that Catholics for Renewal is pursuing with the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which has now commenced its hearings.

In our submission to the Royal Commission (see

<http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/documents.htm>, we proposed wide-ranging reforms to the Church’s operation and governance, in particular:

- “1. The Catholic Church nationally and internationally must accept that its governance structures, culture and practices are seriously deficient and have been responsible for terrible damage to children, and must be reformed as a matter of urgency.*
- 2. The Holy See should be asked to commit to a more accountable, transparent and inclusive Church informed by its member communities, rejecting patriarchal and autocratic cultures.”*

Catholics for Renewal seeks to work within the Church to enable Catholics to address matters that concern the good of the Church, seeking the renewal of the Church in the likeness of Christ, in keeping with our duty as members of the Church. The institutional Church has failed to listen to the people of the Church and clericalism has distracted the Church from the teachings of Jesus.