

Peter Johnstone: The Catholic Church is ‘Circling the Wagons’

“This is no time to circle the wagons in some supposedly self-protective manoeuvre.”
(Archbishop Coleridge, Chair Bishops Commission for the 2020 Plenary Council)

Archbishop Coleridge, in his role as Chair of the Bishops Commission for the 2020 Plenary Council, has recently reinforced his wagon-circling metaphor above saying, *“This is no time for the Church to be putting up signs that say ‘business as usual’”*, and in referring to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has said, *“If we needed any proof, then the Royal Commission has shown that. We need to face the facts, and in the light of the facts, which aren’t always friendly, we have to make big decisions about the future.”*

These messages are far from the rhetoric of Professor Greg Craven of the Australian Catholic University in a prominent article in *The Weekend Australian* of 19-20 August 2017, (*Besieged Catholic Church is wounded, but will not fall*)

When I read the title of Greg Craven’s piece, I expected to read a considered assessment of the lessons learnt by the Church following the devastating revelations of clerical child sexual abuse and its cover-up and protection of paedophiles by bishops throughout the world. As a Catholic observer who has been involved in submissions to the Royal Commission and given public evidence to the Commission, I expected that the conscientious and dedicated work of the Commissioners and their staff would at least have been respectfully acknowledged.

Craven eventually gives some reluctant recognition to the importance of the Commission’s work, but only after the most defensive assertion of the unfairness with which the Catholic Church has been treated, accompanied by general condemnation of the Royal Commission including a wild assertion that it has been “one of the most indifferently conducted royal commissions in recent history.” The main thrust of the piece - supported by many inaccuracies, misrepresentations and exaggerations - is that the Catholic Church is under attack from its “inveterate” enemies, being “*journalists, activists and downright bigots*”, along with “*hobby atheists*”, “*‘progressive’ Catholics*”, and “*even deeply traditional Catholics who take a gloomy pleasure in the ‘end days’*.” The article brazenly portrays the institutional Church as victim, and betrays a hypersensitivity to criticism by a prominent Catholic layman seemingly on behalf of the institutional Church.

Professor Craven, as Vice-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, may feel that the “wounded” Church requires this extreme form of defence. A more considered view would recognise the grave failings that have been exposed and explore how those failings can and must be addressed. This is a time for humility and reform not for ‘circling the wagons’, and certainly the Church should not fail its values yet again by refusing to accept the legitimacy of the condemnations that have flowed from the exposures of the Royal Commission.

It is truly remarkable that Professor Craven failed even to consider how the Catholic Church, in Australia and throughout the world, actually protected and covered-up for paedophiles, thus causing further abuse of children and effectively defying the specific teachings of Jesus regarding the preciousness of children. The Church’s failure to protect children by so many bishops throughout the world is a massive failing of governance – a lack of accountability, transparency and inclusion of the faithful - on which the Royal Commission will no doubt report. However, Professor Craven does not address the Church’s governance failings, and even questions the importance of clericalism which Pope Francis has described as “*an evil in the Church*” and *one of the strongest challenges faced by the Church*.

Craven seems to suggest throughout the article that the established guilt of the Catholic Church in its unchristian and indeed criminal response to clerical child sexual abuse throughout the world is mitigated by pointing to other institutions who share the Catholic Church’s guilt. They will all be dealt with by the commission. The responsibility of Catholics is to face our own failings. Any response should be reasoned and respectful; the recent response by the Church’s officials to the very considered recommendation of the Royal Commission affecting the seal of confession was dogmatic, dismissive, and inconsistent with evidence given to the commission by Church officials.

Craven’s approach is consistent with a seeming denialist attitude displayed recently by some Australian bishops as they consider what he rightly describes as a “horrendous” four years of exposure of “failures of bishops and processes.” Craven chooses to join those bishops in an apparent decision to ‘circle the wagons’ and repel all the arrows of criticism.

The metaphor ends there, as those criticisms perceived as an attack are in fact based on grave evidenced failings of the Church that can only be addressed by resorting to the strongest of Christian values. That will involve painful honesty, humility, repentance and, most importantly, renewal as so many Catholics continue to desert the institution. Responsible Catholics are demanding reform to prevent the Church ‘falling’. Craven’s defensive attitude will encourage a

‘business as usual’ approach by the institutional Church which will certainly lead to the further decimation of the Church and further failures due to continuing poor governance.

Renewal will also require accountability, a notion foreign to the governance of the Catholic Church, plus transparency and inclusion of all the people of God especially women in the business of the Church. Finally, it will require the ability to listen carefully and humbly to the arguments and conclusions of the Royal Commission, an approach attracting ambiguous support at best from Professor Craven.

It seems that Archbishop Coleridge will need to reinforce his commitment to avoid “circling the wagons”.

(A copy of Professor Craven’s article with detailed annotations beyond the matters raised above can be found at document 75 the *Catholics for Renewal website*, <http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/documents.htm>)

Besieged Catholic Church is wounded, but will not fall

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GREG CRAVEN



Columnist Melbourne

(Professor Greg Craven is vice-chancellor of the Australian Catholic University. He is a member of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council, and advised the Catholic bishops on its establishment)

Have things ever seemed worse for the Catholic Church in Australia? If it were a boxer, it would look tangled in the ropes, sliding towards the canvas and spitting blood. The past four years have been horrendous. Endless, horrifying accounts of historical child abuse. A royal commission relentlessly critiquing failures of bishops and processes. The media baying for yet more blood. Cardinal George Pell charged with abuse offences. The cardinal has the full presumption of innocence, but the communal trauma is palpable.

And now, a report from the commission eviscerating the Catholic sacrament of confession. How much worse can this get? (*Note: “eviscerating the Catholic sacrament of confession” is a gross exaggeration continued throughout the article; the recommendation of the Royal Commission on confession is very targeted, only applying to sins of child sexual abuse and seen as necessary to protect children from paedophiles known through confession to be ‘at large’ in the community.*)

The entire spectacle has been relished by journalists, activists and downright bigots praying fervently to a non-existent God for the implosion of the Catholic Church. (*Note: The article thus commences by playing the victim in a matter where the Church has much to answer for.*) It would not be fair to say such critics have no interest in child abuse. No one can stomach the victimisation of children, by Catholics or others.

But to inveterate enemies of the church, the appalling reality of the scandal is incidental. They have battled Catholicism bitterly for decades on issues such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. To anti-Catholic enthusiasts such as David Marr and Peter Fitzsimons, Catholicism has stood — if not alone, then lonely — against their self-focused creed of secular politics. This is their opportunity to kick the church hard when it is down. In normal circumstances, you could make these points without tarring and feathering. But these are not normal times. (*Note: It is the Church which has given “anti-Catholic enthusiasts” a free kick through protecting paedophiles; Professor Craven apparently wants the Church to play the victim.*)

In November 2012, Julia Gillard as prime minister announced a royal commission into the causes of institutional child abuse. The effect has been to judicialise and objectify the whole issue. (*Note: These are unevidenced generalisations apparently designed to denigrate the Royal Commission, and indeed all royal commissions.*)

Despite assurances, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child

Sexual Abuse overwhelmingly has conducted itself, and has been viewed, as an inquiry into Catholic child abuse. *(Note: To the extent this may be so in the minds of some, it is the shocking evidence and scale of the Catholic Church's behaviour that has generated Church criticism, rather than the behaviour of the RC.)*

Adoring media outlets have egged it on, with royal commissioner Peter McClellan and counsel assisting Gail Furness seen more as folk heroes than public servants whose performance is to be scrutinised. Any attempt to express or explain a church position is stigmatised as an assault on victims, an abuse of process and a moral contempt of the commission *(Note: This may be Craven's perception but many would dismiss this as a prejudiced generalisation distracting from the grave issues addressed by the RC. It is to the Church's credit that it has very carefully avoided criticism of victims, conscious of their often-damaged lives and their courage)*. In this climate, the only case is for the prosecution. The subject matter of discussion is so awful and the media treatment so partisan and sensational that counterargument is complicity. Disaster for the "traditional" church, with its bishops and celibate clergy, is eagerly anticipated by a surprisingly wide range of enthusiasts. *(Note: Royal Commissions in general, and this one in particular, must take careful steps to avoid such prejudice. This is an unproved defamatory allegation against the Royal Commission and its officers)*.

Of course, there are the hobby atheists. Then there are various "progressive" Catholics, who see the situation as an opportunity to impose their own swinging view of Catholicism. There are even deeply traditional Catholics who take a gloomy pleasure in the "end days": a bit like Evelyn Waugh's fantasy to be the last altar boy at the last mass of the last pope. Oddly enough, all these zealots *(Note: a simplistic attempt to condemn as zealots and to deny hearing to any Catholics properly horrified by the institutional Church's protection of paedophiles, placing the reputation of the institutional Church above the safety of children)* are doomed to disappointment. The Catholic Church in Australia is deeply shaken but will not fall. *(Note: Responsible Catholics are demanding reform to prevent the Church 'falling'. Craven's defensive attitude will encourage a 'business as usual' approach by the institutional Church which will certainly lead to the further decimation of the Church and further failures due to continuing poor governance.)*

(Note: The following para is just a distraction with very little relevance to the current discussion apart from playing the victim, and surprisingly even pointing to other times when the Church needed reform.) Consider the attacks the church has faced in the past. Beyond the comfy puddle of Australia media politics, it is a reasonable assessment that if the Roman Empire and atheistic communism could not destroy the church, the ABC's Q&A and *The Sydney*

Morning Herald will be challenged. Internally, the church has survived pornocrat popes, sale of indulgences, simony and its own sponsoring of sporadic religious persecution. Closer to home, the Australian church has been on the skids before. In the 19th century, liberal secularist governments withdrew funding for Catholic schools. Thereafter, for decades, Catholics routinely experienced bigotry in employment, politics and social life. Catholic schools approached equitable government funding only in the 1960s.

The church will come through the present horror but must do two things. There is a tremendous tension between these fundamental imperatives. The first is to acknowledge and atone for the atrocious crimes committed under its roof. The church must apologise, compensate and prevent on a comprehensive basis. Without that, it can never shed this shame. ***(Note: Of particular importance is to “prevent on a comprehensive basis”, which requires the sort of analysis undertaken by the RC. There is no mention in the discussion below of what the Church should do, of the need for the Church to examine why it protected paedophiles throughout the world, and what needs to be done to correct the proven dysfunctional governance and culture. Also, this recognition of the Church’s crimes should be at the beginning of the article.)***

But a real challenge is being heard above the swirl of negative spin and comment. Apologies are still demanded when they repeatedly have been made. ***(Note: Apologies have rarely mentioned, let alone described in any detail, the nature of the institutional Church’s own irresponsible and criminal behaviour throughout the world in protecting paedophiles, and placing the reputation of the institutional Church above the safety of children. There are still canonical provisions that seek to prevent bishops, through applying ‘pontifical secrecy’, from reporting paedophile priests to civil authorities - a limited exception was introduced in 2010 for bishops who are subject to a civil law mandating such reporting, the ‘keeping bishops out of gaol’ provision.)*** Appearances by church leaders before the royal commission are insisted on when they already have occurred ***(Note: evidence of this?)***. Dreadful and genuine statistics of abuse are cited, but without the footnote that they are decades old, reduced to a - still repulsive - trickle by reforms embedded for 20 years.

The average citizen would be astonished the Catholic Church was the first religion to commit to the proposed national redress scheme ***(Note: Yes, a good and appropriate move that is welcome, but is no more than a responsible approach)***. Others are yet to sign on. The government of South Australia remains distinctly frosty. ***(Note: Craven seems to suggest throughout the article that the undoubted guilt of the Catholic Church in its unchristian and indeed criminal response to clerical child sexual abuse throughout the world***

is mitigated by pointing to faults of others.)

The second core obligation of the church is to assess the directions and recommendations of the royal commission on their merits. So far, everything out of the commission has been received by the media in an odour of sanctity (*Note: A responsible media should take seriously, in the absence of grounded concerns, any recommendation of a Royal Commission in the first instance*).

But, realistically, the royal commission will produce everything from wisdom to howlers, as revealed by its recent criminal justice report, notably including outrageous propositions on the sacrament of confession (*Note: howlers and outrageous propositions? These are certainly not established by Professor Craven – see below*). As a church whose credibility stands in question, the Catholic Church needs for the sake of the faithful and society to call proposals for what they are. (*Note: Indeed, but any response should be reasoned and respectful; the recent response to the very considered recommendation of the Royal Commission affecting the seal of confession was dogmatic, dismissive, and inconsistent with evidence given to the RC by Church officials*).

The central problem with the commission is that its appalling subject matter has conferred a dangerously self-justifying credibility. People choose to forget the unappealing potential of royal commissions that always have made them dubious to lawyers and civil libertarians. (*Note: RCs remain an appropriate and objective tool of government for dealing with major societal threats such as child sexual abuse, especially by churches to whom society credits high standards.*)

They are not courts but conscript the credibility of courts. They are not bound in the traditional way by the rules of evidence. They are good at airing allegations but typically weak at developing policy. They are beloved by the media as often presenting the possibility of a legally sanctioned witch-hunt. (*Note: Generalisations which Craven is applying to all royal commissions in order to denigrate the McClellan RC. Royal Commissions use their undoubted powers to develop recommendations after fully gathering and considering evidence.*)

When former High Court judge Dyson Heydon conducted his Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption, we remembered all this. Indeed, we were pointedly reminded by Bill Shorten and his industrial allies. But this royal commission has had an armchair ride. (*Note: This comparison with the Heydon RC is misleading as the Heydon RC dealt with matters which were subject to political contest whereas this Royal Commission was supported by all political parties and most stakeholders. The author might not consider this RC to have “had an armchair ride” if he*

understood the gravity of the impact of thousands of cases of child sexual abuse of innocent children of the Church by offenders seen as ‘in the place of God’, let alone the many other cases of abuse heard by the Commission.)

The grim truth is that by any reasonable standard of legal assessment, this has been one of the most indifferently conducted royal commissions in recent history. *(Note: A gratuitous comment from a clearly biased observer.)* Adored by media groupies, its public flavour has been as a virtual trial of the Catholic Church. *(Note: Inevitable, considering the damning evidence unearthed.)*

The most obvious outcome here is that the obsession of the royal commission with “the Catholics” *(Note: This sort of unsubstantiated and gratuitous criticism simply betrays again the prejudices of the author)* has all but crowded out the scrutiny of other institutions, with predictable results. I personally have run parliamentary, governmental and other public inquiries almost beyond memory. The rule is, if an inquiry gives the impression it is about one subject, the public will take it at its word. *(Note: It appears that Professor Craven accepts this unprincipled ‘rule’, which is far from established, as the norm for inquiries for which he has himself been responsible and is attempting to apply such lack of principle to the McClellan RC, without evidence).*

The commission’s own figures reportedly show a large majority of Australians believe it to be an inquiry into the Catholic Church. Why would they not? This has been the focus and theatre of the commission, and the explicit reporting of much media. Few would have read Gerard Henderson’s repeated analysis in this newspaper that historic rates of offending were proportionally higher in the Uniting Church than the Catholic Church. Given the conduct of the commission, even fewer would believe it. *(Note: The fact is that nearly 40% of all people who attended a private session with a Commissioner (4,444) reported abuse occurring in Catholic Church institutions. The Royal Commission will also report on the terrible record within the works of the Uniting Church and elsewhere.)*

As a former crown counsel to the Victorian government, I have some insight into historic child abuse within Australian public institutions. State governments collectively are breathing a sigh of relief the commission’s focus on church abuse largely has let them off the hook. *(Note: a big call - yet to be evidenced. The RC did in fact examine the horror of child sexual abuse in State government institutions and will no doubt report. The public has legitimately very high expectations of churches which receive considerable government support largely on the assumption that they contribute to society values; the Royal Commission had to deal with the hypocrisy of a Church claiming*

gospel values while covering-up child abuse internationally and exposing further children to harm.)

Of course, such comments immediately are condemned as an attempt to divert attention from the church. (*Note: Yes, and not unreasonably*) Actually, they assert the equal value of every victim. (*Note: The article focuses however on diverting attention from the Catholic Church.*)

Probably the most remarkable display of the Catholic obsession of the commission is its treatment of the sacrament of confession in its recent criminal justice report released earlier this week. The proposals and reasoning of the commission on confession are a mix of incomprehension and an utter determination to reach a particular conclusion. (*Note: This is a stark misrepresentation of the Royal Commission's careful and detailed consideration of the issues, and the necessary balance between religious freedom and society's responsibility to protect children.*)

Had they been drafted by Furness when she worked for me at a Victorian parliamentary committee, they would have been returned to sender (*Note: Perhaps the Editor of the Australian should have 'returned to sender' this article. This is little more than a gratuitous insult to the Senior Counsel, and shows a remarkable ignorance and an exaggeration of the role of the Senior Counsel as against the role and responsibility of the Commissioners for all recommendations; it is the report of the Commissioners, not the Senior Counsel*).

The commission claims that, in confession, children have disclosed their abuse without it being pursued and priestly offenders have confessed their crimes to assuage their guilt. One stark reality here is the thinness of supporting evidence for these claims of systemic confessional abuse. Despite its pronouncements, the commission points to only a handful of actual cases — all dreadful — but comprising no general pattern. (*Note: a general pattern is irrelevant in addressing the established possibility.*) Its real “evidence” seems to be one academic study from Ireland and the testimony of one Australian psychologist, whose quotations in the commission's own report typically are in terms of generalities rather than particular cases.

The commission was unimpressed by repeated evidence from those administering confession, bishops and priests, that people so lost to shame as to be child abusers do not confess their sin. (*Note: Not my recollection – at least a gross over-simplification of the evidence and, in any event, not relevant to the need to cover the possibility of a paedophile at large confessing and continuing to abuse.*) Nor did it seem interested in the practicality that a

standard confessor would demand disclosure to police before absolution. (*Note: Not so - this was a proposal of Catholics for Renewal to both the Vic Parliamentary Inquiry and the RC that got some airing at the RC but no practical response from the bishops, not even guidance to confessors; the reference to a 'standard' confessor seems imaginative.*) Or that a confessor, faced with child abuse, is entitled to counsel that child to report it and to accompany them in so doing. (*Note: Entitlement and counsel are hardly relevant to the problem.*)

But the commission's greatest failure was its utter inability to understand confession in the context of religious freedom. It airily acknowledged the concept but cited balance, declaring freedom of religion always must give way to the legal protection of children. (*Note: 'airily' 'declaring' misrepresents the Report's careful consideration of the matter.*) The commission apparently does not grasp that its recommendations, in practical terms, would abolish the central Catholic sacrament of confession. (*Note: This is simply not so, and is a gross catastrophising of the recommendation which applies only to the confessing of child sexual abuse, an occurrence that Craven himself suggests above is a rare occurrence.*)

Thus, a Catholic priest who breaks the seal is automatically excommunicated. He is no longer a priest. Yet if he keeps the seal, he is a criminal. McClellan effectively proposes that it be illegal to be a Catholic priest. (*Note: It is not the RC's or governments' problem if the Church chooses to require its priests to act illegally – reasonable law-making in the interests of society is not, and should not be, constrained by the internal laws of churches. The Church would have to decide whether to recognise the reality of the priest's civil obligation in a small change to canon law, for which there are precedents.*) To be a Catholic in good standing, one must confess annually. You confess to a priest bound by the confessional seal. At law, Australian priests no longer will be so bound. McClellan's proposals would make it impossible to live fully as a Catholic. (*Note: Again, this is simply not so and is another gross catastrophising of the recommendation - a misrepresentation of the proposal which would only apply to child sex abusers.*)

This is not some subtle rebalancing of freedom of religion. It is the greatest attack on this human right in Australian history. (*Note: 'human right'? 'attack' – more simplistic catastrophising; the recommendation is a reasoned attempt to ensure that known paedophiles are reported to the police and only affects confessing paedophiles. Freedom of religion must not extend to practices that put other members of society, children in this case, at risk.*)

Is there also a certain unattractive pragmatism here, the assumption being that

such cases will not go to law because who knows what happens in the confessional? But Catholic priests such as Frank Brennan will make it precisely clear what they are doing, and bishops will instruct their priests publicly. They all face the prospect of imprisonment. *(Note: A very unlikely scenario that could only eventuate if the Church fails to recognise the need for simple adjustments to canon law in response to a reasonable civil law made in the interests of protecting children from known paedophiles. As already alluded to in the article, imprisonment could only follow a successful prosecution which would presumably require either the confessor himself or, even less likely, the confessing paedophile to alert police. One might reasonably expect that the Church would make a small change to canon law in the interests of preventing known paedophiles remaining at large as a threat to children.)*

Has it occurred to McClellan that if Brennan says what he has said this week if and after these laws are passed, he undoubtedly would be guilty of the offence of incitement? *(Note: ‘Undoubtedly’? ‘incitement’? – this seems to be more catastrophising and a very long bow!)* Would any decent Australian politician turn the key?

The last piece of this sad confessional jigsaw is a depressing professional hubris. *(Note: Seems rather that Professor Craven suffers from this.)*

Apart from the confessional, we have some psychological, journalistic and — most important — legal privilege. Surely if priests must disclose, the same rule should apply to journalists, shrinks and lawyers? *(Note: These are separate arguments that involve different questions. If the point is made, and that is a separate issue, it is not an argument against requiring reporting by confessors. The point is a red herring.)* The commission really is interested only in legal privilege. Its response is, of course it must be treated differently because, well, this is about lawyers, and the justice system could not operate. So priests must disclose confessions of abuse but lawyers need not. Journalists, beware.

Sadly, the performance of the commission around the confessional becomes less remarkable when set in the context of some of its previous operations. *(Note: This suggestion that the RC’s ‘previous operations’ have been inadequate is clearly an attempt to denigrate all the work of the RC; see the examples quoted below which fail to make the case.)*

By its own terms of reference, the commission was required to present its final report on December 31, 2015, critically providing a rapid response to victims and clear reform directions for institutions. *(Note: The initial announcements made clear that the government recognised that the time for the inquiry could*

need to be extended given the complexities and overseas experience; there was no stress on a quick response.)

Instead, in June 2014 the commission demanded two extra years (*Note: “demanded” is incorrect and emotive – see above*) and now will not report until next year. (*Note: not so – the RC’s published scheduled date for its final report is 15 December this year*) The result is that victims will have been hanging on an answer for almost five years, and institutions deprived of an implementable blueprint (*Note: Wrongly based and emotive comment without justification.*) - all at astronomical cost (*Note: the cost has been high as was always expected in the interests of a thorough inquiry and known sensitivities.*)

Along the way, the commission has engaged in some extraordinary activities. It gave jailed master pedophile Gerald Ridsdale an electronic platform for testimony to distress countless victims. (*Note: Arguably, this was critical evidence that gave satisfaction to many survivors.*) Only recently, chairman McClellan gave a funeral eulogy for victim activist Anthony Foster, a participant in some of the processes of his own royal commission. (*Note: Anthony Foster was the father of two daughters abused sexually by priests, and with his wife had told their tragic story and pursued justice. In this tragic story, the suggestion that Justice McClellan’s kind eulogy could prejudice any proceedings is extremely dubious.*)

Simultaneously, much of the time the commission has been essentially clueless about the realities of the Australian Catholic Church (*Note: Royal commissions establish facts in complex matters and this RC is already seen by many experts in the field to have done that very well by international standards, including Catholic matters on which the Church itself has been shown to have inadequately developed knowledge*). It remains obsessed with celibacy as a cause of child abuse, when it is clear abuse is prevalent in numerous contexts not involving celibacy, both religious and secular. It apparently cannot grasp that imposed celibacy logically may foster illicit sexual activity but not necessarily child abuse. (*Note: A simplistic description of the RC’s reasonable consideration of and hearing of evidence on this matter. Craven accepts that celibacy may in fact foster child abuse, but ‘not necessarily’, a view that is probably accepted by the RC and that the RC demonstrably has “grasped”.*)

Bewilderingly, the commission seems to believe the Australian church is a lay serfdom, the laity passive objects of clerical power. (*Note: This language is clearly emotive and not based on any RC statements. “Lay serfdom” betrays a schoolboy debating style of exaggerating to facilitate denial. It is a matter of fact however that the Church is an autocracy with few structures or practices*

requiring bishops to consult with the laity on matters of Church governance.) This despite the fact Catholic education systems, schools, hospitals, social services and universities routinely are run by laypeople, many of them powerful women. *(Note: These matters pertain to agencies of the Church, not to the governance of the Church itself.)* All of these perceived deficiencies regularly are ascribed to the vice of “clericalism”, for which there seems to be no accessible definition. Clericalism, like its many cousins — prominently including legalism — is one variant of the pathology of contextual power. It needs to be combated as such, with measures and safeguards, not employed as an all-purpose term of condemnation. *(Note: These comments about ‘clericalism’ seem disingenuous - clericalism has been thoroughly discussed and indeed defined, and presented as a major concern in evidence to the RC; Pope Francis has described clericalism as “an evil in the Church” and one of the strongest challenges faced by the Church.)*

Finally, the royal commission cannot resist the idea that if only the church could function as a modern corporation, all would be well. After more than four years, it has yet to grasp that assuring against child abuse in a church is not the same thing as embedding corporate governance. *(Note: Where has the RC ever suggested that assuring against child abuse in a church is “the same thing as embedding corporate governance”? However, the RC has certainly received evidence that the Church’s governance, despite the teaching of Vatican II, is dysfunctional, being non-accountable, non-transparent and non-inclusive, particularly of women, a critical matter that the Church and this article have failed to address. Good governance is simply the effective bringing together of human beings for a joint purpose and is not necessarily related to “corporate governance.” The author’s dismissive reference to corporate governance shows a limited understanding of the concept.)*

The great challenge for the church, therefore, will be to respond positively to the numerous sound recommendations that inevitably will proceed from the royal commission, while persuasively rejecting those founded in misassessment, ignorance or institutional prejudice. *(Note: This is little more than an attempt to discredit the RC without evidence. Craven needs to demonstrate that there is a danger of such recommendations which this article fails to do.)*

That the church will face sound and deeply confronting findings by the royal commission is beyond all question *(Note: A surprising admission at the end of an article so critical of the RC’s competence; the article could have helpfully focussed on likely “sound and deeply confronting findings” and proposed positive responses from the Church.)* The commission has made clear its preference for a fully independent redress scheme, and the church has embraced this. The same has happened in the context of comprehensive standards for

child protection.

There will be many more requirements to come. Proposals around the capacity of the church to be sued, the statute of limitations and the conduct of criminal trials are all emerging. The church must co-operate in and contribute to genuine reform. *(Note: Indeed, but the thrust of the article discourages such cooperation.)*

Close to home are likely recommendations on Catholic seminaries and priestly training. We are good at theology and philosophy, but the church needs to think hard about how it equips future priests in vital fields such as psychology, counselling and administration. *(Note: Some good points which the article could have helpfully addressed more fully as important means of ensuring that the Church “will not fall”).*

The sanctity of the confessional must be maintained, but its safety for children assured. *(Note: See earlier comments, noting that the RC’s recommendation re reporting paedophiles is specifically designed to assure the safety of children)* The days of school kids confessing out of sight of an independent adult are over.

Corporate fantasies aside *(Note: What “corporate fantasies”? Another dismissive comment without evidence)*, there are wide opportunities to further involve laity working with bishops and clergy to assure justice, process and outcomes. This is a challenge for the church, but also an enormous opportunity. *(Note: Indeed, and more helpful than the earlier red herring of a “lay serfdom”).*

Perhaps the greatest irony in this whole desperate discussion of the future of the Australian church is to place it in real, wider context; to compare the directions of the Catholic Church worldwide with our Australian national realities. In Australia, we have political leaders we routinely despise. Each prime minister seems worse than the last.

Parties compete in devising policies likeliest to seduce the populace, and least likely to address fundamental problems. Confidence in institutions — including churches — has never been lower.

Yet at a global level we have one of the truly great popes. *(Note: Craven has failed to consider the cover-up of clerical child sexual abuse as a pervasive global failing of the Church, but he claims the achievements of the Church at a global level.)* Francis teaches not just a religious but a social creed of love, tolerance and empathy. He agonises about displaced people, the poor, the

uneducated and those without healthcare. He detests child abuse.

When he talks about these things, people are not cynical. They recognise truth and sincerity when they hear it.

As one unlikely Australian politician said to me, if Francis were eligible to stand for election as president of Australia, he would sweep the field. The Australian church, acting humbly and justly in the spirit of Francis and his master, will survive. *(Note: The above comments focus on the positives of the universal Church under Francis, but distract from the grave negative issues raised before the RC which are also evidenced elsewhere in the world. The issue of the Church's immoral and criminal protection of clerical child sexual abusers and failure to protect children is universal and raises fundamental questions about the dysfunctional governance of the Church, questions that are not addressed by Professor Craven. The article seems designed to play the victim in anticipating grave criticism by the Royal Commission.)*