

'Sex Crimes and the Catholic Church: Will a Parliamentary Inquiry and a Royal Commission deliver justice to victims, survivors and their families?'

Welcome

I would like to acknowledge the Kulin people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to the elders past and present of the Kulin nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present today.

Introduction

I want to thank the Castan Centre for inviting me to speak today, on what is not just a very topical issue, but a crucial important one at both a national and international level.

I have been asked to address whether the Victorian Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations and the recently established national Royal Commission into child abuse, will deliver justice to survivors of Catholic clergy sex abuse and their families.

Why I am doing this research?

Many ask me why I am doing this work. Not long after I completed my honours' thesis in law, in 2006, (I was looking at appeals against convictions of child sexual assault and the extraordinary difficulties victims of child sexual abuse faced in the criminal jurisdiction), a close family member of mine disclosed to me that he had been anally raped by a Christian brother at school when he was 11 years of age.

I followed his journey over the years. I familiarized myself with the civil law in this area and soon realized there were multiple 'legal brick walls' facing victims, if they wanted to sue the church. I also learnt about the Towards Healing process as my relative was treated unfairly and unjustly in that process. I spoke to legal advocates and many victims and survivors and their families. Justice was not only unattainable, further injustices faced these people.

This is when, just over three years ago, I decided to do this research.

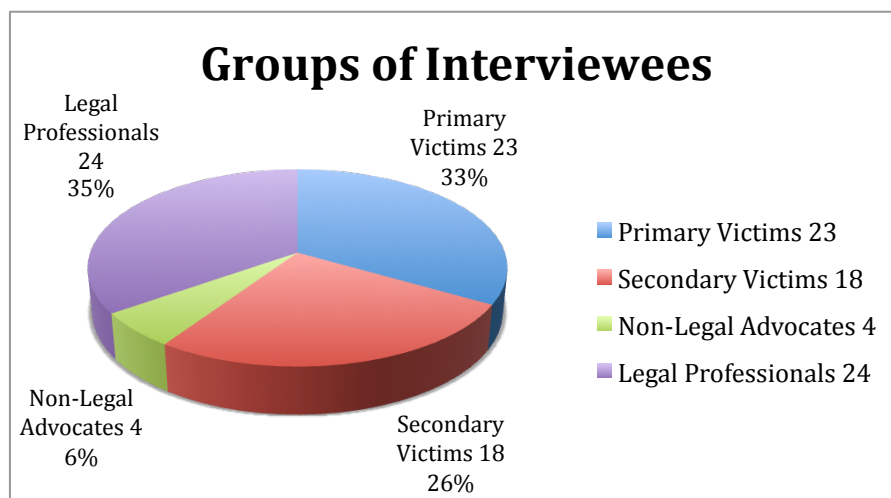
I guess too, I wouldn't accept the argument of many which was, 'well this is the way the law is', we'll just have to work with it and around it. 'Yes, the church's complaints processes are shocking and re-abusive, we'll have to try and get the Church to improve their processes'. I thought, no, we need law reform. We need the church, and the governments, to be accountable. So, here I am.

The research

With my research I wanted to examine whether or not victims of catholic clergy sexual assault were finding justice. To do this, I focused on which pathways victims had been down to find justice. Two such pathways (there were others) were the criminal jurisdiction (prosecutions and convictions of the accused) and the civil jurisdiction (suing either the church or diocese, the particular religious order or even the offender).

To gather the data, I interviewed about 70 people from Victoria and NSW. They were:

- Primary victims/survivors
- Secondary victims (family members, partners and loved ones)
- Legal professional - solicitors, prosecutors, civil and criminal barristers, judges, and
- Non-legal advocates



I will now briefly outline some of the inherent problems or concerns with the criminal and civil options for victims.

Criminal jurisdiction

In relation to the criminal jurisdiction, it is well established that convictions for child sexual assaults are low and appeal rates are high. One way of looking at this is to imagine that we have 1000 people in the community who are victims of child sexual assault. A maximum of about 100 of these victims will report these crimes to the police. There is a diminution effect such that only about 6 convictions will result from these reports. Earlier research of mine found that about 55% of these convictions are appealed of which more than half are successful. Another way of looking at this is we end up with about a 6% conviction rate of those that report to the police, or 0.06% of those in the community.

In relation to Catholic clergy child sexual assault, Victoria police quote a figure of reporting to the police of about 8%, bringing those above numbers down even further.

Combined with what is termed the 'secondary legal trauma' of a victim going through a trial and cross-examination, there is, overall, much disincentive for victims of child sexual assault to choose this pathway as a means of finding some justice.

Of course the other contributing factor with the criminal pathway, is the inherently long time, or delay, between the offences occurring and reporting or disclosing the crime – an average of 26 years. This of course, brings its own evidentiary problems in a trial, making a successful outcome for the victim even more difficult.

Civil jurisdiction

With the second pathway, the civil jurisdiction, several impediments exist.

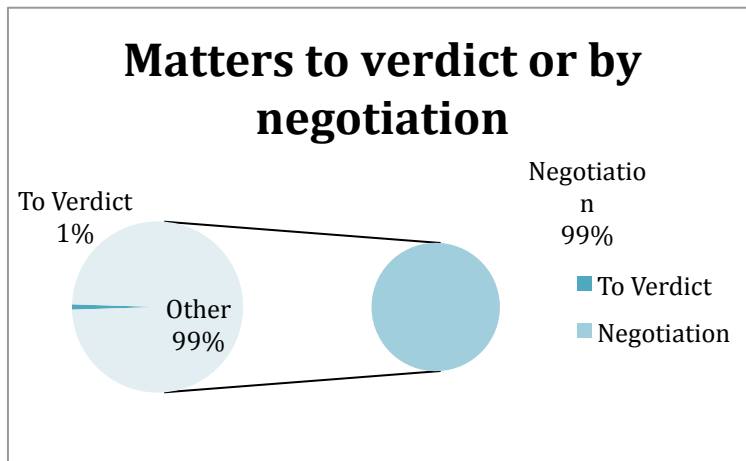
Statute of limitations: As mentioned earlier, one of the well-recognised and inherent problems with child sexual assault is that victims typically don't report or disclose the crimes for decades, if ever. This fact is not reflected, not catered for, in these statutes. So the first hurdle would be to apply to the courts for an extension of time in which to hear the case.

Ellis defence: The second impediment relates to what is commonly called the 'Ellis defence'. Basically, this came from a 2007 NSW Court of Appeal case in which Ellis, the plaintiff, tried to sue, amongst others, the Sydney Archdiocese Property Trust – a trust that held and managed the assets and property of the Sydney archdiocese. Every diocese and religious order is structured in the same way. Basically, the Catholic church successfully argued in this case, that the Property Trust is not the right entity to sue because the trustees were never responsible for the behaviour of the priests. Because there is no other legal entity for the Church to sue for these mostly historical crimes, victims are stymied. Or, another way of looking at it is, the Catholic church is effectively immune from suit.

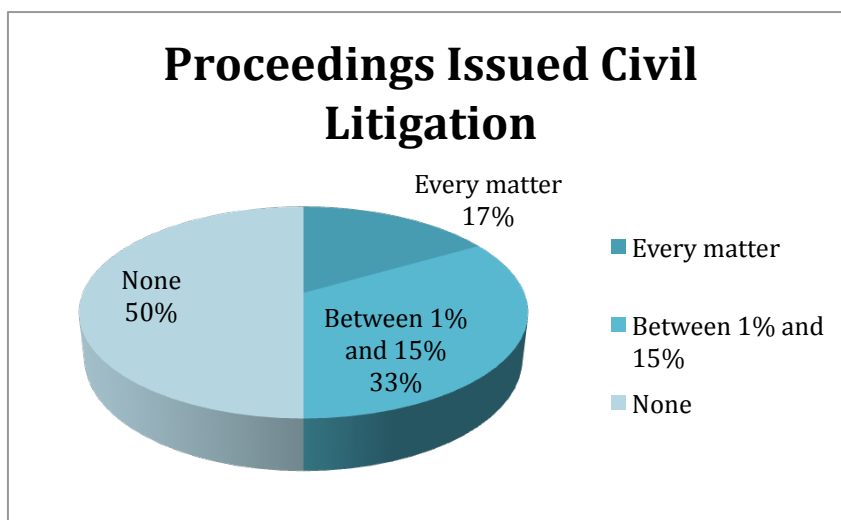
The research

Coming back to the research on this point, let's look at what lawyers are doing for victims in relation to litigating and financial compensation.

Firstly, apart from one matter in the late 1990s, a class action that went all the way to the High Court and failed, every other Catholic matter has had to be negotiated.



Negotiation is very common in litigation, but with the Catholic cases, and because of the Ellis defence, half of the lawyers never issue proceedings (that is, lodge writs with the courts). About a third of the lawyers very occasionally (between 1% and 15% of their cases) issue proceedings, and only a few lawyers (less than a fifth) will issue proceedings with every matter. Interestingly though, regardless of whether proceedings are issued or not, only one case has gone to adjudication, or verdict, since the early 1990s. This is due to the Ellis defence.



The lawyers I interviewed have represented about 2200 victims of clergy abuse, between them. The class action I mentioned consisted of about 200 clients. That leaves a further 2000 odd cases from the group of lawyers I interviewed that have also suffered as a result of the Ellis defence. What this means at a national level is that there are possibly tens of thousands of clergy victims who do not have access to the civil courts – a clear breach of a fundamental human right.

Corporation Sole: Problems exist too if one is trying to sue the archbishop or bishop from the time of the assaults. Once again, because there may be decades before reporting the crimes, the Bishop of the time is often dead or in a nursing home. But one is prevented from suing an incumbent bishop because he is not what is called a ‘corporation sole’. That is, the current bishop cannot be held liable for any of the wrongs of his predecessor, such as, for example, concealing the crimes of the accused or offender.

Vicarious Liability: The other impediment relates to the law of vicarious liability – a very old doctrine in which an employer can be held liable, albeit vicariously, for the negligence of wrongs of the employee. Australia’s conservative approach with this doctrine in relation to sex crimes by the employee, contrasts sharply with the recent advancements in the UK and Canada, where Catholic Archdioceses have been held vicariously liable for the sexual assaults on children by one of its priests.

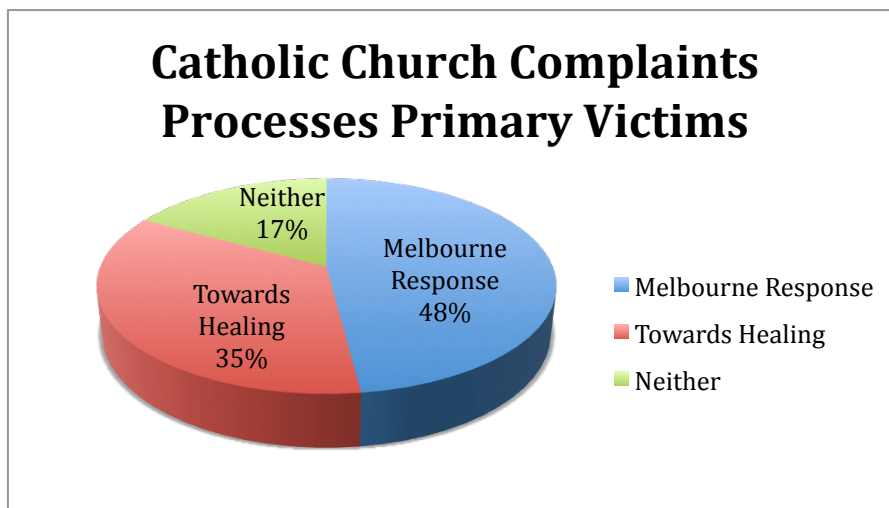
So, in summary, victims of catholic clergy sexual abuse are severely limited, or hamstrung, if they want to find some justice in the criminal and the civil courts.

So, where do they go now?

Catholic Church complaints processes – Melbourne Response and Towards Healing

Both of these processes were set up in 1996/1997. Cardinal Pell, Archbishop of Melbourne at the time, established what is called the Melbourne Response, which

covers the geographical region of the Melbourne Archdiocese and Towards Healing deals with complaints from the rest of the country.



Nearly half of the primary victims interviewed had been through the Melbourne Response process, about 35% the Towards Healing process whilst just under a fifth had not been through either process. These numbers do not represent the national or even the Victorian picture, as the majority of the interviewees were from Melbourne.

Both of these processes investigate complaints from victims and decide, on the balance of probabilities (or the lower civil standard of proof) if the complaint is true, based on the evidence at the time.

Problems with the processes

There are many problems with both of these processes.

Criminal investigations

The very first problem with these processes is that, fundamentally, the Catholic church is investigating the sex crimes of its own clergy. Sex crimes that the church has tried to cover up for decades. No organization should be investigating itself. Sex crimes are matters for the police and the state.

Independence

Secondly, the church claims that the processes and their personnel are independent of the church. This is not the case.

Firstly, bishops and leaders of the different religious orders (such as the Christian Brothers or the Salesians) appoint the personnel who work for Towards Healing. The personnel at the Melbourne Response are all appointed by the Archbishop of Melbourne. Both processes are designed by the church and fully paid for by the church.

Not only is the manner of appointment of the personnel for these processes very important, so too is the appearance or perception by the public of independence. The evidence from my research indicates overwhelmingly that these processes are not seen to be independent.

Transparency

Thirdly, there is no transparency with either process. Towards Healing does have a publicly available set of protocols or procedures, but because each case is dealt with by individual bishops or provincials of religious orders, there is no transparency of the implementation of that process.

Legalistic processes

Both processes claim to offer a pastoral, informal, compassionate and victim-focused approach. This is definitely not the case. Both processes are unarguably legalistic and adversarial. The Melbourne Response has appointed a QC as the investigator and decision-maker, and the compensation panel is headed by another senior counsel. With Towards Healing, each diocese or religious order retains their own legal team which are

at the heart of these cases. Many victims going through these processes feeling as though they are the one on trial, as though they are being treated as the perpetrator.

My research also shows that the majority of lawyers found the Catholic church, compared with other religious and non-religious organisations, were generally much more legalistic. Other comments included: the church made it harder for victims; made

smaller offers; were more hostile; were completely and utterly arrogant; had to be dragged kicking and screaming all the way; they dodge, duck and weave all the way; they deny and strike out applications.

Legal Representation

In relation to legal representation, the research shows that there is often a policy at both processes of actively lobbying victims to not have legal representation.

It was found that when a victim goes through either process unrepresented, they were daunted as they were uniformed and unfamiliar with the process. They had to confront the church, who had supported the offenders for decades, all over again and alone.

Victims were at a disadvantage due to marked power discrepancies. Mostly, victims cannot negotiate effectively and on an equal footing with the church authorities. They were severely disadvantaged in terms of financial compensation. One lawyer who has represented between 500 and 600 clients, says that his clients receive amounts that are 10 times those of Towards Healing and Melbourne Response.

Compensation

There is a cap of \$75,000 with the Melbourne Response and there is no cap for Towards Healing. This is accepted in theory with Towards Healing, but not in practice, as some religious orders for example, do impose their own caps.

With the Melbourne Response, the church claims that the \$75,000 cap, or \$50,000 as it used to be, is automatically paid to victims where there have been penetrative offences. But, this is not true. Many cases where there has been sexual penetration of a child have received far far less than the cap.

Whether compensation is to be paid and how much, is decided by the compensation panel at the Melbourne Response and by the relevant bishop or provincial of the particular religious order, for Towards Healing process.

With Towards Healing, and according to their own protocols, the church must respond to the needs of victims with justice and compassion. At the same time, the provision of an apology, counseling or compensation is completely discretionary. That is, every bishop and every head of Australia's 140, roughly, religious orders, has absolute and individual discretion as to whether, firstly, compensation is to be paid at all, and secondly, what that the amount might be. So, one bishop who is empathetic and understanding may pay, say \$70,000, whilst another, where the injuries for the victim could be far worse, might receive \$15,000 or less. There is no consistency and there are absolutely no guidelines. Discrepancies are the norm.

It is the same with the Melbourne Response, which hasn't published any processes or guidelines at all in relation to the workings of its compensation panel.

As I said earlier, the amounts of compensation received through these two processes are paltry and can be up to ten times less than what is being received by lawyers external to these processes. Also, any settlements by negotiation are made with denials of liability.

Victims need equal access to the civil courts to address this insupportable and unjust situation.

No Appeal or Review

There is no independent review of the decisions from both processes. Also, there is no internal review or appeal by Melbourne Response or Towards Healing of compensation amounts or the provision of an apology or counseling. Towards Healing does provide for a review of its process only.

Overall experiences

The overall experiences of victims who have been through these processes are horrific and wrenching.

It is to be noted, too, that the victims' evidence in this research is very firmly buttressed, or supported, by the evidence from the legal professionals, who, as I said before, have represented about 2200 catholic clergy victims of sexual assault.

Experiences of primary and secondary victims

- Frightened, scared and like it's a nightmare
- Embarrassed, humiliated insulted and degraded
- As bad or worse than the original abuse and more ongoing
- Felt interrogated and misunderstood by the 'professionals' who represent the same male authority figure of the church who protected the offenders, held all the power and made all the decisions.
- Felt stripped bare and bullied
- Felt like the instigator of the abuse and the criminal – like being on trial
- Fearful, lonely and distraught
- Retraumatized
- Melbourne Response is corrupt and swindles the victims

The lawyers said:

- One lawyer with 200 clients didn't know of one person who had had a good Towards Healing experience.

- Melbourne Response is very damaging for the victims (especially if un-represented)
- Melbourne Response was a response ‘to meet the political or organisational needs of the Melbourne Archdiocese, and to some extent even the abusers, rather than the needs of the victims’
- Melbourne Response isolates the victims, disempowers them and minimises their story
- Exploitation of already vulnerable people.
- There is re-abuse and re-traumatisation
- Towards Healing is a sham and a kangaroo court

One victim said of the Towards Healing experience:

I was so close to getting a car and driving it through ... the gates of St Pat's school and smashing into the school with my car and killing myself.

Another said:

'It's not Towards Healing, it actually takes you towards madness'.

And of the Melbourne Response a victim said:

Once they know they've destroyed the mind, then they hit them with a sledge hammer, then they give them a pittance, go away, nothing. Then they go on and talk to the press, "we're helping the victims" ... And you think, you liars. And if a victim suicides, good, we don't have to pay the compensation. They don't give a damn about the dead victim.

Suicides and premature deaths

I also want to touch on an issue of paramount importance, Catholic clergy-related suicides and premature deaths.

More than half, 56%, of the primary victims associated with the secondary victims who were interviewed, had suicided or died prematurely in the years following catholic clergy child sexual assaults. Along with the 40 plus reported suicides of clergy victims of notorious paedophiles, Best and Ridsdale, this is a very disturbing statistic.

In relation to my research, about half of the deaths reported were boys who had been sexually assaulted by one of two alleged offenders from the Gardenvale parish, south of Melbourne. A secondary victim who used to be a parishioner at Gardenvale, and whose son had killed himself at the age of 22, reported other suicides or suspected suicides of young men who were either in the choir at this parish or were altar boys. There are up to 8 suicides, attempted suicides or premature deaths and at least 5 others with psychiatric and/or psychological problems. This is the evidence from one woman from one parish.

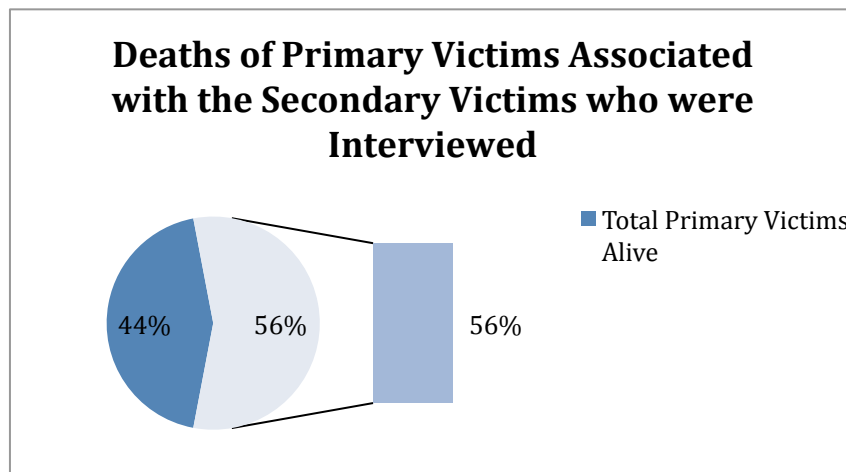
What can be drawn from this evidence is that this issue is calling out for further research. Of course, at this stage, we have no causal connection between the clergy sex crimes and the suicides. But there is one constant – that is, those who have killed themselves or died prematurely (and usually from drugs and/or alcohol) all have a reported or suspected history of clergy sex abuse. It is this connection, or this common thread, that needs urgent examination. How many other families are out there suffering in silence whose child/sibling/partner has taken their own life and who has a history of clergy sex abuse?

Of course the known cases of suicides would have been the subject of a Coroner's investigation and finding. But, importantly, the coroner would not have been privy to what we now see as a common thread or theme with these deaths – the history of clergy sex abuse.

All of these tragic, these devastating cases need to be re-opened and re-examined by the Coroner. There is a systemic issue here. A primary purpose or aim of the Coroners Act (Victoria) is to contribute to the reduction of the number of preventable deaths. This is achieved through the findings of the coroner's investigations and the making of recommendations. And, these deaths are preventable.

It is my understanding that Victoria Police is now conducting preliminary investigations into the suicides and premature deaths associated with Best and Ridsdale with a view to handing a report to the Coroner. I have been pushing for the Coroner's involvement, or re-involvement, of these cases for about two years now.

Importantly, we need to know the true number, nationally, of such suicides. The families and loved ones of these people need and deserve answers and they deserve justice.



Justice for victims and their families – criteria for justice

Turning now to the question of whether the Victorian Inquiry and the Royal Commission can deliver justice to victims of catholic clergy sexual abuse and their families. I want to briefly outline the findings from my research that both inquiries need to address if justice is going to be delivered.

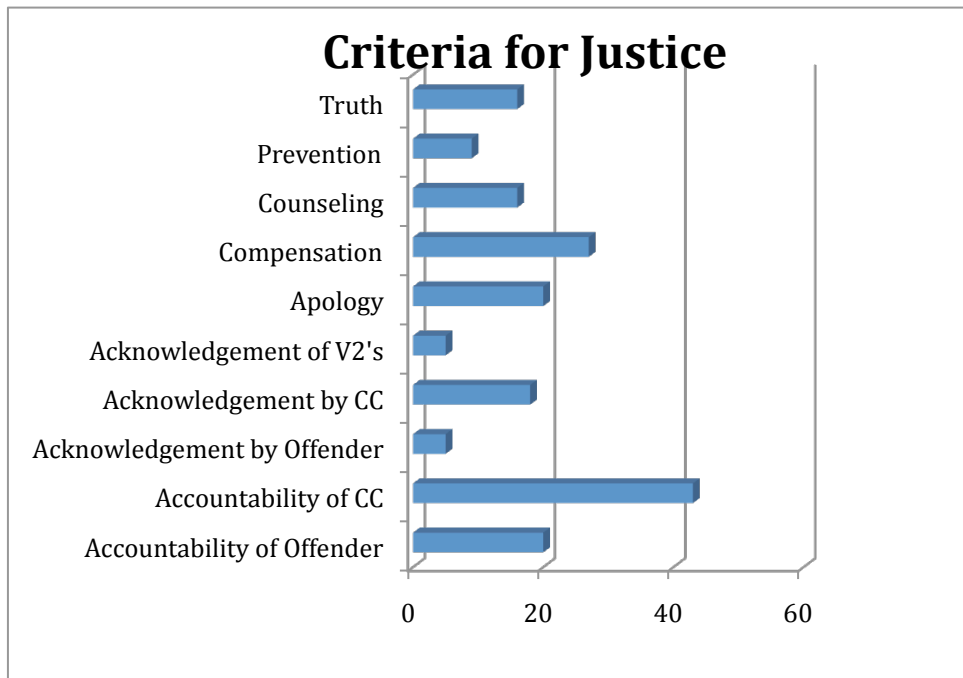
We must bear in mind of course, that both the Committee and the Commission have limitations. Neither is a prosecutorial body, meaning they cannot lay charges against anyone. Rather, each is/will be liaising with the police and the public prosecutors for this purpose. Also, they are unable to pass laws, but they can make strong recommendations for law reform.

Importantly, the Commission does have very broad powers to subpoena witnesses and the production of documents. If these are not forthcoming, criminal sanctions can be imposed.

The Royal Commission also has the legal and forensic might to match the legalistic, adversarial and wealthy Catholic church.

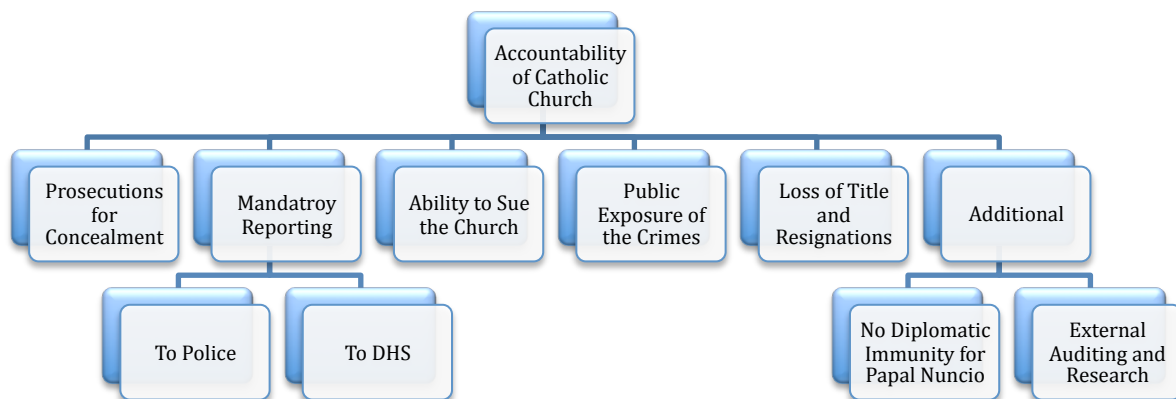
Broadly, if justice is going to be delivered, there are 8 factors, or criteria, that must be attended to if justice is to be forthcoming.

1. Accountability of the offender and the hierarchy
2. Acknowledgment by the offender and by the church
3. Acknowledgement of secondary victims
4. Apology
5. Financial compensation
6. The truth to be told
7. Counseling and healing
8. Prevention



1. Accountability of the Church and the hierarchy

There are many ways in which the very powerful and wealthy Catholic Church, or the hierarchy, need to be held accountable.



Prosecutions for concealing the sex crimes: The most pivotal form of accountability is prosecutions of members of the church who have concealed or covered-up the sex crimes. To date in Australia, there has not been one conviction of a church member for this crime. One senior clergy was charged with misprision of felony (failing to disclose a serious crime) in NSW last year, but he died a few months later and before a trial. A second priest has been charged with the same offence earlier this year and is awaiting trial. A retired bishop in Victoria was charged with misprision of felony, but the charges were dropped, as the sex crimes were not considered serious enough to be a felony, rather they were classified as misdemeanours.

Mandatory Reporting: The other important form of accountability of the clergy members of the church is for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse or suspected abuse

Having a **legal entity to sue** is very high up on the agenda as are **fair and transparent church processes**. The research also found that **public exposure** of the crimes within the church, was necessary if there was to be justice.

Recommendations for the Royal Commission relating to accountability of the church and the hierarchy

If the Royal Commission is to deliver justice, it needs to make recommendations for uniform criminal law provisions for each state and territory that capture all of the essential elements of the crime of concealment of a serious crime. There is no uniformity at the moment in Australia.

It also needs to recommend uniform mandatory reporting legislation for each state and territory. But there needs to be mandatory reporting to the police as well as the Department of Human Services, or its equivalent in other states and territories.

In order to have a legal entity that can be sued by victims and their families, the Commission must recommend amendment of the Statutes of Limitations such that they cater for the fact that victims of child sexual assault do not usually report or disclose their abuse for decades, if ever.

There must be amendment of the different Property Trust Acts of the Dioceses and Religious Orders, thus doing away with the Ellis Defence. This could reflect a Bill put forward by David Shoebridge in NSW last year.

Liaising very closely with the police and the public prosecutors in each state and territory, just as the Victorian Inquiry has been doing, is imperative. This facilitates the charging and prosecuting of those clergy who knew about the sex crimes but did not report them to the civil authorities as well as providing evidence for the prosecutions of the alleged sex offenders.

Accountability of the Offender

Laicisation

Accountability of the offender included criminal prosecutions for the sex crimes and what is called 'laicisation' or 'de-frocking' of the offender.

Laicisation involves a priest losing his clerical state even though his 'sacred ordination' can never become invalid. That means that the offending priest can never again practice in ministry or perform the sacraments.

Laicisation is important as it removes status from the priest. It also removes, what in Catholicism, are unique and God-given powers such as absolving a sinner of their sins and other sacraments. Such powers of the priests have been ruthlessly used to exploit the victim and their families.

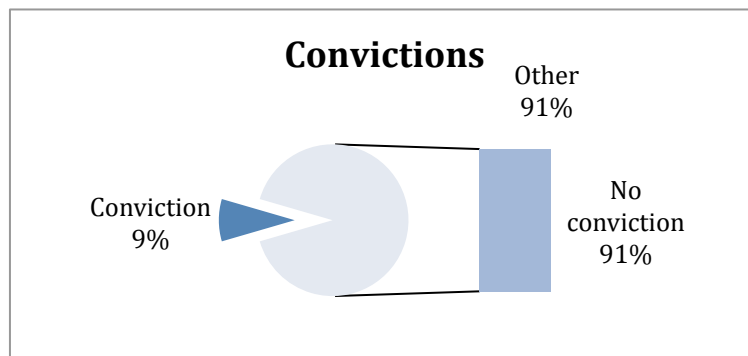
In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, one of four dioceses in Victoria, there have been eight cases forwarded to the Vatican requesting laicization. All eight priests have been convicted, but only six have been laicized so far.

Only one priest in this research had been laicized. He initiated this himself.

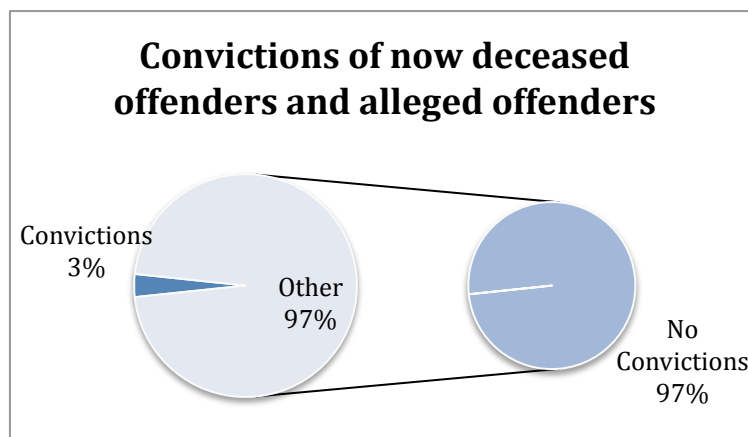
So, if justice is to be measured against this criterion, there has been no justice for all but a couple of victims in this research.

Prosecutions and Convictions

A conviction rate for child sexual assault of 9% is a bit higher than the state average of about 6%. In this sense, this figure is not representative of the general population.



At the time of interview, about a third of the offenders and accused had died. Only one of these had ever been convicted.



The rate of prosecutions and convictions here reflects a profound denial of justice for these victims, especially for those where the offender or alleged offender had died.

As a secondary victim whose son had suicided at age 22, said, there can be no justice. His son was dead, the priest, who was never prosecuted, fled to the UK, and was now dead. This man said:

*What am I supposed to do? Hyptonise myself to believe that all's well, that they've fixed it.
Can we ever get justice? No. Ridiculous.*

Acknowledgement by the offender and by the church of the crimes and their impacts

Acknowledgment by the offender and by the hierarchy includes acknowledgement that the crimes were committed and acknowledgement of the severity and the breadth of the impacts of those crimes, that is, the horrific harm done, including the suicides. There should also be acknowledgement that the hierarchy did not only not protect victims, it supported and basically endorsed the paedophiles and their crimes.

Acknowledgement could take many forms such as plaques and memorials, days of mourning or atonement with public recognition of every victim, alive and dead, documentaries and so on.

Compared with accountability of the offender and the hierarchy, in which nearly half of all primary and secondary victims felt was necessary for justice, acknowledgement by the offender and the hierarchy was far less prominent for the primary and secondary victims.

Not one primary or secondary victim suggested that acknowledgement by the offender was necessary and only a very few found acknowledgement by the hierarchy as important. The need for acknowledgement as a requisite for justice, was proposed almost entirely by the legal professionals.

But, as with accountability, acknowledgement by the church was nearly four times more crucial than acknowledgment by the offender. The institutional church, rather than the paedophile, it seems, is viewed in many ways as the 'more guilty party'.

Apology

According to a report by the Law Commission Canada, 'Restoring Dignity: Responding to Child Abuse in Canadian Institutions', an apology, like an acknowledgement, confirms the truth. The elements necessary for a meaningful apology are:

- Acknowledgement of the wrong done
- Accepting responsibility for the wrong that was done
- The expression of sincere regret or remorse
- Assurance that the wrong will not recur
- Reparation through concrete measures

Apart from monetary compensation, an apology was the next most significant requirement if justice is to be delivered. More than a quarter of all interviewees discussed the relevance and importance of an apology from the church.

Let us examine the recent apology from Cardinal Pell which was given at both the beginning and the end of Pell's evidence to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry a couple of months ago.

... I am, to use the words of the Premier, fully apologetic and absolutely sorry. I repeat that I am committed to working to make improvements.

With the high profile apology at the Victorian Inquiry, Pell did not use his own words, rather those of the Premier of Victoria indicating they were not an expression of sincere regret or remorse. This apology did not include an acknowledgement of the wrong done. There was no assurance that the wrongs will not recur. There was no mention of reparation through concrete measures and there was no attempt by the Cardinal to 'respond to the needs of the survivor', in good faith.

Whether victims can ever receive a meaningful or effective apology that is inclusive of the above elements, is, in my view, highly doubtful.

Monetary compensation

Financial compensation for victims of crime is nothing new. Victims of crime have a legislative right to claim compensation. In Victoria we have the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and the *Sentencing Act*. Both here in Australia and overseas there are multiple types of redress schemes and legislative provisions addressing this issue. That is, a right to financial compensation for victims of clergy sexual assaults, is a no-brainer when viewed in international, federal and state contexts.

Second to accountability of the Catholic Church, financial compensation was seen by more than 40% of all interviewees in this research, as essential if justice is to be delivered.

The Truth

In many ways 'the truth' is part and parcel of an acknowledgement, which, in turn, is a requisite element of an effective apology.

But some interviewees specifically discussed the importance of the truth per se. This means two things: The truth from the viewpoint of the victim and the truth from the viewpoint of the hierarchy. In other words, both are paramount if there is to be some justice.

Other

Counseling for primary and secondary victims is indivisible from all the other elements of justice. Also, prevention of further crimes was paramount and many spoke of the very strong desire or need that this sort of crime never happens again.

Conclusion of criteria for justice

In relation to what is necessary for justice to be delivered, by far the most suggestions from interviewees were associated with accountability of the church and the hierarchy. This element, or requirement, of justice involved more than twice the number of suggestions compared with accountability of the offender and about 40% more than financial compensation.

Also, twice as many primary victims discussed accountability of the hierarchy compared with accountability of their offender.

So what is all this saying? The members of the hierarchy, by not reporting known offenders to the police and moving them into innocent parishes and schools, are also responsible for subsequent offending. That is, any further sex crimes were basically fostered or facilitated by the bishops and archbishops of the time. This worldwide 'policy' of 'covering-up' the crimes, stems from the Vatican.

The original sex crimes were one thing. The subsequent denials from the hierarchy, the imposed silence, the lies, not believing victims and the serious abuse of victims by the church's internal complaints processes, have all contributed to what is often called 'secondary abuse' of victims by the church. But, it is not a secondary abuse. It is a fresh round of abuse – another primary abuse of these victims. As such, accountability of the church, as shown in this research, reflects what is a criminal and stark culpability of the church and its hierarchy in these matters.

Conclusion

The Victorian Inquiry has completed hearings and is currently writing up its report. The Royal Commission, which is yet to commence public hearings, will be gathering evidence nationally on these issues. In short, both bodies will need to address the above criteria if justice is to be delivered.

Victims and their families, and the nation, are relying heavily on both of these bodies and the recommendations they make. But, recommendations will be just half the job done. It will then be up to the governments of the day, federal and state, to act on and implement those recommendations.

Victims and their families have in many ways already triumphed. It is their extraordinary courage, their stoicism and their very big hearts that have brought about the Victorian Inquiry, the current NSW inquiry and the Royal Commission.

It will now be up to all of us to keep fighting, to keep putting pressure on governments to do what is really, their fundamental duty. As I wrote in an opinion piece in the Canberra Times recently:

It is for governments the world over to excise themselves politically and economically from the burly hip of the church. Governments must stand up to the church, just as the Australian government has done with its royal commission, and breathe new life into the requisite secular laws that will help bring about criminal prosecutions and accountability of the guilty ones.

Thank you very much.