



George Pell's barrister accuses witness of trying to 'big-note' himself

Bernard Barrett, from Broken Rites organisation, was first to give evidence when hearing reopened to public

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A retired academic linked to an abuse research organisation has been accused of trying to “big-note” himself by offering to go to police on behalf of an alleged victim making historical sexual offence allegations against Cardinal George Pell.

The committal hearing for Pell, who is Australia’s most senior Catholic, was reopened to the public and media on Wednesday afternoon in Melbourne’s magistrate’s court after almost eight days of closed evidence from complainants.

Bernard Barrett assists the abuse research organisation Broken Rites, which documents historical cases of child sexual abuse and advises victims of their options, and he was first to give evidence once the court reopened.

The barrister representing Pell, Robert Richter QC, said when a complainant came to Barrett with an allegation against Pell, Barrett suggested he be the one go to police in his capacity with Broken Rites.

Richter told Barrett: “You wanted to big-note yourself with police didn’t you, because you suggested to him [the alleged victim] it might be better if you were to get the attention of the [police] taskforce.”

Barrett responded that Richter was “wrong, wrong, wrong” and that he offered to call police on the alleged victim’s behalf in order to ensure he got through to the right officer. Magistrate Belinda Wallington intervened, saying that whether Barrett was trying to big-note himself or not was irrelevant to the hearing.

In a heated exchange, Barrett was pressed by Richter about notes he kept about abuse cases in his role with Broken Rites. Barrett said he did not always take notes when alleged victims came to him.

“I suggest you keep notes and you suppressed them,” Richter said, which Barrett denied.

He also asked Barrett: “Would you have considered it a considerable victory if you could pin something on Cardinal Pell as doing something wrong?”

Barrett responded: “Not really.”

Richter asked Barrett whether he and Broken Rites believed the high authorities of the Catholic church were covering up abuse.

“That’s what the church admits,” Barrett said. “That’s our research. We weren’t making accusations. We just state the facts.”

Richter asked: “Has it been your position for many years?”

When Barrett responded: “That’s what the church admits,” Richter retorted: “Are you capable of listening to a question and answering it?” He also accused Barrett of evading questions.

The committal hearing began on 5 March but was closed to the media and the public while the complainants gave evidence and were cross-examined, which is not unusual in cases involving historical sexual offence allegations. The rest of the hearing is expected to remain open and continue for another two and a half weeks.

Pell, 76, has repeatedly and vehemently denied the offences he is charged with. He does not need to enter a formal plea unless committed by Wallington to stand trial. He has taken leave from his position as financial controller of the Vatican in Rome while the hearing takes place.

The committal hearing continues.

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