

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations

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### **SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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I have been a Catholic for all of my 59 years. I have never suffered abuse, and I was never aware of any of my childhood Catholic friends being abused. But I have no doubt that evil and undeserved abuse was happening for decades, to significant numbers of people, perpetrated by a significant minority of the Catholic clergy under a cloak of secrecy provided by the power and influence of our church.

I also wish to acknowledge my deep sadness and guilt that for all of my life as an adult Catholic I have done nothing, until now, to attempt to make my church a more human and transparent organisation. I believe that the rank-and-file members of the church such as myself should have made their voices heard over the decades. So I wish to say that I am sorry to all those who were abused then, and have had the abuse multiplied by the secrecy and self-serving responses of some of those in positions of power in the Catholic Church. As a person who has regularly made financial contributions to the church I have in some way contributed to the (often derisory and/or confidential) financial payments made to victims.

I suggest that the reality is that there is no practical mechanism in the operations of the Catholic Church, either in Australia or in the world, for the huge mass of the laity to express their opinions or concerns. But it is not enough for lay voices to just be heard: they need to be a key part of the decision-making process, of the operations. The top echelon of the clergy has demonstrated its ongoing incapacity to deal with the issue of abuse: it has not been about justice and honesty as far as they are concerned, but about risk-management and damage-control. I think that the Victorian enquiry can, appropriately, exert pressure on the organisations responsible (the Catholic Church in this case) to facilitate a greater degree of democracy in them. This would I believe reduce the likelihood of future episodes.

I believe that a key role of the enquiry is to call to account the leaders of the Catholic Church, not just in Australia but at the Vatican. In the same way that the Chairman of a company, its board and its CEO can be called to accept responsibility for their wrongdoings (omissions of good, proper deeds and commissions of evil acts) the worldwide leadership of the Catholic Church should be called upon to respond in person to the Victorian enquiry: to acknowledge the wrongs and to submit a blueprint for the democratic renewal which provides a possibility of system-hidden abuse not happening again.