

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Melbourne — 15 March 2013

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Ms M. Newman.

The CHAIR — Good morning, everyone. In accordance with the guidelines for the hearings, I remind members of the public gallery that they cannot participate in any way in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the Family and Community Development Committee secretariat are to approach committee members. Members of the media are also requested to observe the media guidelines. I ask you all to turn off your mobile phones whilst in the gallery.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome Ms Margaret Newman. Thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. This hearing today is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript. Following your presentation today the committee members will have questions relating to both your submission, which you have provided to us — we have all read that; it is very detailed, thank you very much — and your oral evidence. Thank you again for being before us. Please commence.

Ms NEWMAN — Thank you. I acknowledge the First Peoples — Indigenous Australian Citizens. I thank each and all who demonstrate public concern in the inquiry and commission. It takes moral or ethical fortitude. It has helped me to recall and, so to speak, maintain the rage over violence, abuse and sexual abuse.

Not violent, not silent. I do have trauma memory loss of the time immediately before and after the first violent assault and premeditated public sexualisation of my clear and open schoolyard relating with my peers by Religious. Religious are female, and Clergy are male.

I am here as a primary and secondary victim of the Roman Catholic Church and witness to our survival under extreme hardship and real-life depletion which has yet to be redeemed from the dogmatic, dictatorial, predatory, misogynistic practice, putative leadership and leadership of Christianity, for that is what is meant by the elisionary small-c church.

Is it fear of the Butterfly Effect? Not, merely cases of excited individual paranoia and spin.

Given the time limits, I treat of socially destabilising embattlement with the RCC. On some occasions I have been treated salubrious fare.

The Pope, retiring into luxury, was viewed on television in rank parody of victims of the church. Arms outstretched, he is suffering with the victims. There was no media outcry. Who and how are his advisers? Whom does the Pope, noblesse oblige, recommend us to on Earth? We are to live our Religion. Victims do not volunteer to be made victims, to persevere and subsist as victims, to die as victims of a church. A Pope has set his sails; he is headed for the ultimate seat on earth to the likes of his mentality.

I am grateful to those who are somehow educated and studied with me in good sound sense and integrity under the auspice of the RCC.

There is a phenomenon I would have responsibly considered at this point — a grooming and abusing psychological and affective mien to consider as a stream of consciousness here. It sounded: psychopathic persona with sociopathic behaviours and multiple recidivisms. I have found sexual ditherers and abusers, both, to be deniers of their very senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, in grooming stages; and so of sense; and so to absence of conscience in their purposive and focused quest for their libidinal, élan vital and sexual satings.

Firstly I will speak of an aspect of my RCC education under the auspice of two Orders of Religious. My education spanned five Religious Orders. I did consider joining a Religious Order; I never, ever offered to do so for good reasons. Borne out.

Second, I'll give witness to entrenched malice of RCC Religious and Clergy in the late 20th century — the other was just post mid-20th century — when I went, principally, to examine and discuss from within the Roman Catholic Church and its counselling auspice, not in betrayal, such matters as we work within 2012–13 in the Inquiry and Commission. It never happened; I was spurned. I was only accepted as the maddest amongst the abusive.

My then children and I were targeted. I had purposively shielded them from pitfalls of the RCC's practice, clear as day to me from the 1950s. I am 66 years old.

I had been invited by a Religious PhD in Psychology at a seminar to be in a whole community of supportive women — embracing. The second most important principle to me as we set out interstate had been the pragmatic sense that RCC networks and noblesse oblige would be put into action by her on my professional behalf as a single breadwinner. I had presented my referees in writing and CV, extensive experience as a trusted teacher in tertiary and secondary education, mainly as a mathematician, and multilingual. She was informed. I was never helped professionally. That never happened. Quite the opposite! I was disenfranchised entirely.

Other women and children, to my firsthand and second-hand knowledge, had been targeted. One mother of several, ambivalently dependent on the community, was informed that one child was 'schizophrenic' — a malapropism — likely because she had thought of abortion during a challenging pregnancy. Counsel unfounded in research. The RCC might well promote the psychologist. It is a matter of unadulterated envy — their other behaviours bore that out. Think of the sword of Damocles!

So, abuses. To begin: as a 7-year-old child, come to a new school, called out to stand in front of the assembled parish primary school with a young boy. Harangued, cunningly and in prodigal sadism, putatively, austere — victims off guard — for something hideous, based in fantasy from fossilised internalisations and cathexes of the terrified eroticism of the school principal herself about 'our relating'. We were 'just school friends' he would say. Arraigned, paraded and viciously flayed with uninhibited force, landing her malignant strike at bone and sinew and soft flesh. I watched her. She belonged in a psychotherapy room. Insofar as it was an accustomed physical violence — not! Not at all, except if she were straightjacketed or very doped — sedated.

This event broke me down. It was deafening constitutionally: waking nightmares, disoriented bed-wetting — kept secret by me for I was past expected bed-wetting age. About five years later I had reinvented myself, found Divine Solace and went on to be laughingly scholarly again. Peers, in a classroom, working heads down, then at sudden onset a boy might be pensively viewed in a St Vitus dance in the aisle right close by as she laid upon him with her stick! Physical clumsiness, shattered beauty, stark grinnings over ugliness held sway! She regaled us with stories of to-be-admired-and-emulated Religious licking up vomit from floorboards. We were 7, 8, 9.

It is pertinent here that the history, as I read the website of the parish school, has been altered around her principalship. In secondary school or college there were episodes of storm trooping the classrooms of ever lay teachers' classes that I noted. In year 9 an RCC lay teacher called me to demonstrate a mathematical phenomenon at the blackboard. With my arm raised I was suddenly beaten about my legs.

In year 11, diligent, studious, sports team members — steer clear of trouble, we three. We were called to stand within our class — this is another storm troop — of about 42. Harangued fit for swooning with unblinking, projected weird eroticisations of our relating, heady slander and innuendo disconnected utterly from our public, open, answerable relationships. What sensational notions were aroused and ployed with later on any of those present? There was not a thing dignifiable in it, just a devastating, rampant clamour of godlessness. Not even demoralizing! My own mind blanked.

This extended for me to private insult. The Principal, lurking in wait in the colonnade as I left school — stalking actually, malice prepense — said to me, 'You failed Maths 1!'. I was their top student. What gross clamour. What entire construct. Silence itself was contorted. One peer came to tell me at my bus that she had beaten me in maths. She had been told by a Religious teacher — given her results before the results were published in class. The student was led into the pathos of deluded acting. And 'Nobody is to blame always'.

So, on to the late 20th century, the Church again following up — divorced. We were finally all but ousted from a rest/refuge home for women and children by a putative Religious. I was 'hung up on [her] purity'. She said, 'my purity'. I would not give in to her projected and perverse and perverted, therefore not truly sexual, lesbian exhibitionisms. Leaving space for more women and children to become her prey, I did question her before I left and was informed that I would, amongst other things, have to copy her if I wanted to become a member of the putative Order. We were already set on our way out, dependent only on my taking up reasonable employment.

In general, this is what happened in the space of about two years. I was variously disenfranchised by this group as an Australian citizen, as a taxpayer, as legal custodian of my children, as decision-maker as to my own welfare, as to the interests of my children, as to the commonweal of those about me. In putative counselling

sessions, abused now reactively, now spontaneously and wilfully malice prepense, subjected to a purported capacity to usurp my intellectual, religious and spiritual property, insolently queried as to whether I was 'here' — not there?

Outside putative counselling sessions, the same people — subjected by the counsellors to whimsical and malignant purport of control of my body, outright petrifying, staged, malice prepense, mental cruelty by two of them on two occasions.

Grabbed and shoved into rushed and hurried breasts for her constant charitable acts and her business — profession — so pressed. Purport of intimacy and dead shallow, because I had no contact with her but in abused even by her counselling sessions. Predatory physical touchings up with innuendic tidying away of my elbow as though I might use it violently, or in collusive and gossiping, 'Nudge-nudge, wink-wink, say-no-more mode'. Streams of primary schoolyard vulgar aphorisms any civil child eschewed. Invited, as a final sally, in self-indulgent undermining imperatives, to be more dependent — on them? That was the last I saw or heard of them.

Subjected to having to clean up — and with whom might I talk of such matters as a religious person's coprophilia, scatophilia — a little boys' faecal matter. All neatly presented. A Religious person waylaying me in my inevitable passage to my bedroom, her head bowed over her carefully arrayed décolleté to spurn out later too, 'You can't stay here forever'. Me, a mere mortal?

I was at last absolutely ignored despite, bullet-pointing matters for discussion and reconciliation, ending with the gentle Christian-biblical appeal, in my writing, 'Must I say, "Physician heal thyself"?'.

There was no good to be had of them. It was a matter of faux anything. Faux anything at all!

I reported the corrupt practice of the group to my parish priest and to the cathedral. In the first instance I was slandered, conveniently, for the priest, all unawares, approached the group — their evident social or Roman Catholic Capital prevailed; and in the latter, the cathedral case, dismissively I was told that they knew nothing of such matters. Base mendacity. What do these people think we are? The Religious and Clergy have led some of the most corrupt, historically prominent evils ever perpetrated on humankind.

This is conveniently immoral, unethical poltroonism — and they are only conveniently self-deceptive. They fool no-one else. And we citizens need to stand by the maxim, 'Not violent. Not silent'.

I am about to jump the shark. I consider the RCC in a state of phallus worship, in the anthropological and ethnological sense, and the Clergy might just as well join a mardi gras as slip about in crowds of masculinised smocking.

Where are the women? Where do the women belong in any but the most primitive conceptualisations of a society for the commonweal? We must have balance. I am wearing a badge here: the centenary of women's vote in Victoria, in 2008. It is a strange matter, for women have been quite talkative. To vote they merely had to turn up and make a cross on the papers. They did not have to be literate! Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Margaret. As I said at the outset, thank you for providing your written submission. In your written submission you indicate that abuse occurred on a number of occasions. I am just wondering whether you reported that to a CASA, a Centre Against Sexual Assault — at any point.

Ms NEWMAN — At the time? No, I have never reported it to the police yet.

The CHAIR — Did you report it to CASA at any point?

Ms NEWMAN — No. Should I do that?

The CHAIR — Are you asking me?

Ms NEWMAN — Yes, I am.

The CHAIR — Are you asking me whether you should report it to the police?

Ms NEWMAN — Yes.

The CHAIR — There are processes in place if you would like to speak to the police. They will be able to follow up your allegations.

Ms NEWMAN — I would like to, yes. Thank you.

The CHAIR — The secretariat can help you with that.

Mr McGUIRE — Margaret, thank you very much for the effort you put into your contribution today. It is important that we get this on the record. I would just like to take a forward-looking view on what you think needs to be changed. We are trying to give the Parliament practical things that can be changed. You covered a wide range of issues in your submission. What would be the highest priority that you think would be really important to effect change?

Ms NEWMAN — Right. Well, I am very much about citizenship, and I am actually thinking that when I go to church — which I do, because I need Divine Worship in my life — I am being homilised to and preached to and interacted with by male priests, who are not really fully answerable citizens, and I consider that really the Church needs to be forced to have their priests, have their clergy, have their religious, right to the top, answerable to citizens laws.

Mr McGUIRE — The law of the land.

Ms NEWMAN — Yes, the law of the land.

Mr McGUIRE — Ahead of canon law or any other law?

Ms NEWMAN — Yes. They can embattle us in debate if they want to, but they need to be answerable. I think it is ridiculous — what do you say? One is supposed to take them as models — to find models who are not really citizens and are not answerable in the same way as I am.

Mr McGUIRE — So that would be a fundamental start, to get that?

Ms NEWMAN — That is one. The other is that I think passports should be removed from anyone who is in any way alleged to have been involved in any kind of paedophilic activity. I think passports have been conveniently used and abused by the Church. That is what I have heard here at the public hearings; that is what I have heard other witnesses say.

Mr McGUIRE — To stop people under suspicion moving to new jurisdictions?

Ms NEWMAN — Yes.

Mr McGUIRE — That is good. Next?

Ms NEWMAN — I really want to take away all of their passports and say, ‘Look, we’ve got a citizen’s oath here. Do you want to become Australian citizens or not?’

Mr McGUIRE — That is good. I was just after some practical propositions.

Ms NEWMAN — There is another thing that I really demand. I love some of the Jesuits; the lovely poet Peter Steele died recently. I loved him. I suddenly discovered that Jesuits are not allowed to look on women. That is a very peculiar situation, as far as I am concerned. I do not know what on earth that makes of women in the congregation and what that makes of me in relating to them. I was at home quite often quizzically wondering what had happened and knowing perfectly well that I had been civil and mannered in relating — and interesting and valuable. I would have that the rule of any Order at all be out in the public forum, out in the public venue, on the internet, because I only found out at age 65 that the Jesuits are not looking at women.

Mr McGUIRE — So a rule for equality within whatever organisations and churches.

Ms NEWMAN — Yes, the rules must be out — they have Orders, and the Orders have rules. The rules must be out on the web so that every citizen interacting with these teachers — often — knows what is going on. There is a Jesuit Pope. Is he going to look at us?

Mr McGUIRE — That would fit within the laws of the land as well — about equality and equal opportunity?

Ms NEWMAN — Oh, yes; that is the idea.

Mrs COOTE — Margaret, thank you very much indeed. You were obviously a really bright child and really good at maths, obviously.

Ms NEWMAN — Yes, I was.

Mrs COOTE — Do you think that you were targeted or groomed by these people? Or was it actually the obverse, that instead of grooming you, they actually punished you for being bright? Do you think that was what happened?

Ms NEWMAN — I cannot tell. I do not know, but I suspect it. You have got to suspect it, when they are actually fiddling around with your results. There was no way that I had failed maths 1 in year 11. There are two maths — maths 1 and maths 2. Of course I took the prize out in both of them. I was expected to get the exhibition in French. I went to University High School for my final year. It was a school for the gifted. It was that sort of level. There was no way that had been done. She lurked in the colonnade where I would go, because I did not want to be bored with not having a perfect uniform. I wore it perfectly. I could not be bothered with that. She lurked and said to me to my face, ‘You failed maths 1’. I just turned and walked straight up the colonnade knowing that she would be observing me. I have the spooky feeling and I have fantasies — there is nothing provable — that there is something of that. Now, I also think it has to do with female sexuality, with the female sexual/reproductive system, to be quite honest. There are various things in mathematics called period and sine — the sine waves and all that sort of thing, wave theory and periods.

I think, quite frankly, that we can abort. I think that is what I did. I know I have presage. The man I married and left in 1981 died recently. I saw in my thinking as I went off to sleep a massive event coming up — a heart attack. We have presage, we have prescience, we have ordered lives and so on. At least once I knew that I had conceived. I knew to myself, ‘This is not being carried’. When I conceived my son I knew to myself, ‘This is a strong one’. That has happened in my life, but I have no proof; it is only spooky stuff. It is not paranoia; it is spooky stuff at this level.

There is interesting research going on. If you go to the Eastern Resource Centre in Melbourne University, you will find interesting research being done and led by Melbourne female research doctors — medicos — on the female reproductive system. I am not sure; I think there is something in that. But it has to be mind-reading or something, something spooky, because I was not doing anything bad, I really was not. We were about no fuss, get on, play sport, bang that ball. You know: hit a softball and get in the team and try and win.

Mrs COOTE — Thank you very much indeed.

Mr O’BRIEN — Thank you, Margaret. In your paper you have just provided to us you have said ‘What I want’ and you have listed a number of things.

Ms NEWMAN — Yes.

Mr O’BRIEN — Can I ask you about two of the topics, and perhaps you could explain what you want and why you would seek that. The first is that you make some comments about the confessional.

Ms NEWMAN — Right. I did, didn’t I? My realisation there seems to be that if I go to a priest, if I seek forgiveness, I have to prepare myself in remorse and promise that I will not do such a thing again and that in fact it will be a case like this: not violent, not silent, that I will encourage others not to do it, if that is where I have gone. I can do that in a jail or I can do it in any place that you can think of in the human mind. I can be absolved by a priest. That is an instrumental situation where the priest and I may well connect and somehow — and this is spooky stuff, which I do come to contemplate — I am given a peace over this thing that I regret enormously, so enormously that I go into a confessional where I stand before a priest, which is spooky stuff,

and say I have done this dreadful thing and that I cannot cope with it alone or something. But there is no way that there is any connection whatsoever, any necessity for there to be secrecy. It can be exposed and then they are forgiven.

The trick is that you have to find divine forgiveness; it has to be a divinity. Otherwise, what are we talking about with regard to the confessional and absolution and so on? What is all that? It is sacramental, it is about divinity, it is about the divine, it is about extraordinariness, transcendence. These days they say transformation; I do not know why.

Mr O'BRIEN — The second one I would like to ask you about that you have mentioned is item 4 on page 9. You say:

Mandatory celibacy is another furphy and a breach of fundamental human rights.

Can you explain what you mean there?

Ms NEWMAN — I do not know anything about what you do with your genitals. I do not consent to knowing what these people parading around are doing. Some of them are really sincere and great people, loving people, and trying really, really hard against it. I do not consent any longer to know they are celibate, because I have been trained to think, 'Oh, I must feel really that they're closer to God because they've given up this thing' — this is from like four or five years old — and then it gets all this value-added stuff and then it gets all this filthy stuff, which is coming, I think, from their frustrations.

I think that our sexuality is a personal thing and it is a fundamental human right to express it, and I do not think that somebody else putting a mandatory rule upon a whole stack of people — typically men in power — is at all meaningful. I think it is screwed. Misleading and misled.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Margaret. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for coming before us this morning and for providing your submission. Your evidence has been most helpful. Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.