

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 25 March 2013

#### Members

Mrs A. Coote

Ms G. Crozier

Ms B. Halfpenny

Mr F. McGuire

Mr D. O'Brien

Mr N. Wakeling

Chair: Ms G. Crozier

Deputy Chair: Mr F. McGuire

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Dr J. Bush

Research Officer: Ms V. Finn

#### Witnesses

Professor M. Parer,

Ms M. Parer, and

Ms C. Barraclough, therapist, Windermere Child and Family Services.

**The CHAIR** — Good morning, everybody. 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 all those in the public gallery if they could all turn off their mobile phones.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome Professor Michael Parer, Ms Marlene Parer, and Carol Barraclough. Thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. I want to explain that all evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. If your evidence contains adverse comments or allegations about any individuals, I request that you do not refer to the names of any individual. If you do make an adverse reflection about a person and name them, I will suppress that evidence.

This hearing today is being recorded and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Following your presentation committee members will ask questions relating to the inquiry and to the submission that you have provided to us. I know that you have a longstanding knowledge of this area, Michael, and you have provided us with some additional information this morning. There are a number of personal assertions in your submission, I think, that have been raised with us. You have raised concerns about the way that matters have been handled within the church, and obviously there are issues that the committee is considering.

We welcome you here this morning and thank you for your time. We look forward to hearing from you. Please commence when you are ready.

**Prof. PARER** — Thank you, Georgie. Thanks for the invitation to this significant committee. I pay my respects to the elders, past and present, of the Wurundjeri owners of this country.

I retain my priestly status but not my clerical status; I am a non-clerical priest. I treasure my priesthood and commitment to Jesus, but I have no wish to be identified with the current Catholic Church. With many, I hope Pope Frank will become another John XXIII.

I endorse your focus on the Catholic Church and religious organisations. I am aware of the widespread abuse among families, and I recognise many who have been so abused feel left out of this inquiry, and I would ask that in your recommendations you consider family victims also.

I appear with my wife, Mally — Marlene — of 43 years. We have 4 children, 11 grandchildren and almost 3 great-grandchildren. Unexpectedly last Thursday our eldest son, Benjamin, turned up from the UK. We have an extended family of 26, but of all those the only one who participates in the sacramental life of the church and Sunday Mass is Mally. She takes each of us with her in her heart.

Also with me is Carol Barraclough of Windermere. Your secretariat and the Department of Justice offered her, the team leader of the victims assistance and counselling program, as their referral agent in Gippsland. Carol stressed that her first concern was my own personal wellbeing. I thank Carol, and I thank your secretariat and staff for your assistance.

I am a member of the following organisations, but do not represent them in any way. They have made their own submissions. First, I am a member of Corpus Christi College Guys — members who have been at Corpus Christi seminary and who meet monthly just for fellowship. Out of that group grew For The Innocent, which meets monthly to craft an apology to the victims and survivors, and also to work within parishes to see if we can support people there. I am an ordinary member of In Good Faith and Associates, and the Melbourne Victims Collective. I am a foundation member of COIN — the Commission of Inquiry Now — and I am a long-time supporter of Broken Rites. The people who I mention in my submission are all documented on the Broken Rites website.

I appear before you for a number of reasons. One, to support the innocent victim survivors. Two, to urge that the sovereign state of Victoria reclaim responsibility over Vatican and canon law. Three, to take these clerical sexual abuse matters out of the church's in-house protocols — the Melbourne Process and Towards Healing, and the proposed Truth, Justice and Healing Council, which says that, 'The church will embark on its own processes of atonement and healing'. I abhor that. I urge that you recommend legislation with mandatory

reporting and with severe penalties, including vicarious liability that bishops and vicar-generals report these criminal activities to the legitimate authorities in the police and courts. Five, to keep out members of the Catholic Church Insurance company from the compensation panel discussions — they have a conflict of interest and a statutory and fiduciary obligation to protect their assets, and from what I can see their annual \$70 million profit. Six, to remove the \$75 000 limit, to clarify the nature of the compensation and to remove the confidentiality clauses. Finally, and above all, to allow the message of Jesus to emerge within the pilgrim church of God as decreed by the dogmatic constitution of the church in *Lumen Gentium* at the Second Vatican Council.

I was brought up in a good Catholic family. I had 19 years in Catholic education with nuns and brothers, including eight years at Corpus Christi Seminary, until I was ordained in 1959. I had 10 years in Dalyston, Yarraville and Gordon parishes under Daniel Mannix, Justin Simmons, James Knox and Frank Little. In 1969 Mally and I married, and I was the first Australian Catholic priest publicly married in the church. I have one foot in the pilgrim people of God in the lay state and one foot as a priest. I treasure my work in Melbourne parishes. I was also chaplain to the Catholic Evidence Guild with ecumenical missions, and I was chaplain in Vietnam.

My book, *Dreamer by Day — A Priest Returns to Life*, published by Angus and Robertson and serialised in the *Weekend Australian*, documents my theological growth as a peritus at the Second Vatican Council in the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. It documents my journey out of the parish to the ABC — Australian Broadcasting Commission — and my experiencing true love and marrying. I was sent by the Australian Film and Television School to the US to the Childrens Television Workshop, and that led to my going to Indiana University, where I trained and qualified as a cognitive psychologist. My second book, *Prophets and Losses in the Priesthood — In Quest of the Future Ministry*, outlines my hope for the future of the church and the priesthood. Both of these are available to you online in PDF format, and I have submitted them to your secretariat.

I returned from the US and Iran, and I had 22 years at Deakin, Monash and Melbourne Universities in Educational Development and Research. Then when I retired from Melbourne University in 2001 I volunteered to work with the Indigenous Volunteer Foundation, and AusAID asked me to go to Cambodia, where I have been for 12 years. On July 10 this year I returned from my 31st assignment. Obviously I find that enriching, even though in 10 days I turn 80. There I am a Professor and Chair of Governing Council of Norton University. I am a consultant to the Department of Education and also I am a member of an NGO Developing Cambodia by Degrees an Open eLearning Institute with open and e-learning, and also I am a member of an NGO to create community wealth and develop leaders in the rubber industry.

As I have said, I was at the diocesan seminary of Victoria from 1952 to 1959 — eight years — with 200 there at any one time. We were a closed community. We bonded together as brothers in the highest ideals of Jesus and to serve the people of God. These are my estimates to the best of my knowledge of the figures: during my time there were 445 seminarians and 267 were ordained. Twenty-one are publicly acknowledged guilty of sexual offences, either convicted in court, had compensation awarded against them, apologies from the church, died awaiting trial or fled the country. That makes it 7.7 per cent. These 21 paedophile priests were my mates. The primary concern of mine is the protection of children, but secondly among Corpus Christi priests there is a deep feeling that these priests are sick. They need to be cared for with treatment over a long period. I do not have answers, but it is a concern.

In my first submission I outlined to you two incidents of sexual abuse, one at Corpus Christi College, and the second with the Christian Brothers East St Kilda [**In accordance with the procedures observed by Parliamentary Committees when dealing with witnesses, as stated in the *Guidelines for the Rights and Responsibilities of Witnesses*, a section has been expunged from this place in the transcript – future reference to ‘text expunged’**]. Their abusive behaviour is confirmed by other St Kilda graduates at reunions. As recently as the 15th of this month when we met they confirmed that they too had experienced such sexual molestation. I incorporate my statutory declarations in my written submission and give my permission to you to have them published on your website. You ask, ‘Why did I wait until 2010 to report to the police at the SOCA unit at Morwell?’. At the time I found it pleasurable. I felt it made me special. I thought if brothers did this, it must be okay. I got to the stage of thinking all Christian Brothers must do this. And also, fortunately, I had a very strong and loving family.

In 2010 I concluded that a Commission of Inquiry such as yours was necessary. There had been a lot of discussion about it. So I went to the sexual offences and child abuse investigation team in Morwell. They dealt with me most professionally. I have nothing but the highest praise for them. I asked that my two submissions be sent to the Attorney-General and later to a government inquiry. I dared not hope for the quick setting up of your commission, and now I am delighted that the royal commission starts its first hearing on 3 April.

As a Catholic priest and victim of clerical sexual abuse, I use the word 'incomprehensible'. No-one said it better than Jesus, that they deserve to have a millstone tied around their neck and be thrown into the depths. But it is incomprehensible to me that 21 of my mates that I shared time with at Werribee are publicly acknowledged paedophiles, and only one I ever suspected, the one I document in my submission. Equally incomprehensible, perhaps even more incomprehensible, to me is the cover-up by all the bishops and vicar-generals of my time.—

**[text expunged, see page 3].**

We now accept that there are three competing conceptual paradigms when we look at paedophiles. The first is sin and salvation and redemption. The second is that it is a crime that requires justice. The third is it is pathological needing rehabilitation. Churchmen for too long have focused on the whole issue of sin and salvation. They have failed to see that they are holding criminal evidence and they are obstructing the course of justice by not making that evidence available to the police. I am sad that only two current priests have presented to your inquiry to date — maybe more will come — Kevin Dillon and Joe McMahon. I endorse their submissions, and I endorse the submissions of Des Cahill and Phil O'Donnell, who were also at Werribee.

While I say some negative things about Corpus Christi priests, I must say that they have a remarkable Aussie stamp about them. They have contributed greatly to the wider community, even though sexual abuse taints their daily pastoral activities.

There is a massive disjunction between what the bishops want their followers to believe and what the majority of Catholics actually believe, particularly when it comes to human sexuality. In their submission to you, which I find reads with an element of theological and administrative bullying, on four occasions they mention that they are willing to and will cooperate with the Victorian police. Yet, of the 600 victims who have been before the in-house procedures of the bishops, not one has been reported to the police. Of what I understand to be 60 priests who have come before them, not one has been reported to the police. 'Why?' I ask.

In my life, in my times, I have had 37 victims who have sought my pastoral support. Not one of them has a positive word to say about the church's in-house procedures. They report bruising encounters, being intimidated by bishops and solicitors. These include families abused **[text expunged, see page 3]**. They also include children of families abused by Ron Pickering at our family parish in Gardenvale. Not one speaks of a positive, healing, Jesus-like response from the church protocols. Chrissie Foster, who has appeared before you, writes damningly of George Pell and the Melbourne vicar-generals in *Hell on the Way to Heaven*, and Commissioner Ashton told you that his police have had no cooperation nor a single report of abuse by priests.

My 37 victims may be only 6 per cent; maybe the other 94 per cent have had really good outcomes. This view is also contained in the submissions of Kevin Dillon and Vivian Waller. If my conclusions are wrong, I ask Denis Hart and Peter O'Callaghan and members of the Melbourne Response to get those victims who are satisfied with their outcomes to write to or appear before your commission.

Now we have the Australia Catholic Bishops Conference, their new Truth, Justice and Healing Council yet to appoint a member or set up a secretariat, and sadly they talk of setting up a new in-house process. A meeting on 19 July at the Lewis Holdway Lawyers of the Melbourne Victims cooperative with Bernard Sullivan, the CEO of that Council, met with 20 victims, and listening to their stories would quickly dispel the assurance that bishops have that they are handling the situation properly.

**[text expunged, see page 3].**

This month the archdiocese has written to all priests to attend the meeting, and in it they speak of 'unsubstantiated accusations' against priests in this commission. I will table that letter here for your secretariat. I ask you to call on the vicar-general to explain his assertions that many of your witnesses have perjured themselves under oath with these unsubstantiated accusations. These letters go out to every parish in

Melbourne. They are denigrating your commission. Mark Coleridge of Canberra, now of Brisbane, is the only one I have come across who has summed up the situation. He said:

After 36 years in Catholic ministry it took 'people like me a tragically long time' to see the faces and hear the voices of sexual abuse survivors in the church.

Daniel Mannix — I had the privilege of five years priesthood under him — was very clear in his distinction when he spoke as a bishop and as a citizen. Bishops today are citizens, and they are under the law. Many — most — have withheld evidence in criminal cases. They have perverted the course of justice. I ask: why?

In the heady days of the Vatican Council and Vietnam there were hundreds of priests like myself who left the traditional ministry and married. We became radicals, and fortunately we found exceptional women to marry. Each of them, like Abraham, launched out into a future that they knew not where it was going to go with risky priests who moved out with nothing but a headful of scholastic philosophy and Thomistic theology.

I do not wish to link celibacy with priest paedophilia. I think it is an issue that adults should not waste their time discussing. I hold firmly that celibacy as a condition of priesthood is evil and will bring evil. I believe that the subtle pressures by vocation salespeople who enthused me at 18 years of age to commit myself to the priestly vocation on the condition of celibacy before I knew the joys of sex or the enrichment of a relationship with a woman was a form of deceit. I can only endorse the comments of Keith O'Brien, a retired cardinal from Edinburgh:

Many priests have found it very difficult to cope with celibacy as they lived out their priesthood, and felt the need of a companion, of a woman, to whom they could get married and raise a family of their own.

Among the 21 who have been convicted or found guilty, Vic Rubeo was my roommate in 1955 and has left a long trauma of wounded sufferers. The paedophile priest is a sick person who needs treatment over a long period. The call from Jesus is that these broken priests need care and love. There are no simple solutions, and I do not have any answers, only questions. We are enculturated to believe that confessional forgiveness and sacramental absolution will cure this, but we must realise that these are criminal acts that need to be reported.

When the first cases of sexual abuse by priests came before us, we priests were in utter disbelief; it could not happen. We found all sorts of reasons to excuse them. I continue to be astounded that the guys I knew and the bishops I know continue to sweep it under the carpet and go from parish to parish. It remains a pain and incomprehensible to me. My dilemma was compounded when Bryan Coffey, a close friend and colleague — —

I was chaplain at his ordination — such a sweet innocent. I could not believe he was abusing under-age girls immediately after his ordination, and when he appealed his three-year sentence and had it suspended, he had a chorus of parish supporters cheering him. No mention was made of the outreach to the victims, who felt doubly betrayed.

Bishop Peter Connors, a close friend, was silent, even though Peter has visited 55 families of abused victims. He does his best. He entered the seminary at 16. He has no training in handling these matters. Priests have challenged me: would a Bishop Parer have acted any differently? My response is yes. As soon as I found that sexuality was becoming out of control in my life at Gordon as a priest, I moved to move out of the ministry. I say that if I was a bishop and these came before me, I would have acted swiftly.

When George Pell escorted Gerry Ridsdale to court the general priestly feeling was wonderful support for a fellow priest, but when he was sentenced to 18 years jail, no effort was made by Pell — by George — to outreach to the victims.

Gerry was sent to Sale prison. I sought to visit him. I was told that if I visited him, his family would lose out on one month's visit, so I wrote a note and heard nothing. Gerry comes on parole this year, I believe, after 13 years. I do hope your commission calls him to give testimony.

Can I just sum up with what I recommend to give legislative change? I realise I am a minute overtime. One, that the sovereign state of Victoria reclaim its responsibility over the Vatican and canon law; two, take priestly paedophilia out of the hands of the church in-house protocols and recommend legislation with severe penalties so that bishops and vicar-generals report these criminal activities to the legitimate authority of the police, to be handled by the courts; three legislate mandatory reporting of paedophilia, apart from the confessional; four,

reinforce vicarious liability penalties on those who do not report priestly paedophilia; five, limit members of the Catholic Church Insurance company from the compensation panel discussions — they have a conflict of interest; they have a statutory fiduciary obligation to protect their assets and their profits; and six, remove the \$70 000 limit, clarify the nature of compensation and remove the confidentiality clause.

I thank you for allowing me to appear before you, and I wish you well in your deliberations. If you wish to question either Mally or Carol, they are willing.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Michael. I will ask: would you like to make a comment first, Marlene? No? Carol, would you like to make a comment to the committee?

**Ms BARRACLOUGH** — No, just privileged to support.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. As Chair I need to advise you and members of the media and the public gallery that, pending a revision, a review and publication of the Hansard transcript, all reporting of your evidence will be suppressed pending further notice — an order of the committee — in relation to some of the comments you have made in your formal evidence to us today.

We thank you for your evidence. Obviously, as I said at the outset, you have a longstanding experience and understanding of these issues. In your summation just now you have spoken about six recommendations, Michael, that you think we should be looking at as a committee. You have not addressed the issue of acknowledgement by the church to survivors of abuse. Do you think that is one area the church should undertake themselves?

**Prof. PARER** — Can you just repeat that? What was the one area?

**The CHAIR** — You have recommended legislative change. Do you think also that the church should acknowledge the abuse suffered by victims? You have not acknowledged that anywhere in your submission or your evidence here today. Do you think the church has a responsibility to do that as well?

**Prof. PARER** — Of course — doubly so.

**The CHAIR** — Doubly so. We have heard from a number of victims who think that would assist in their healing process, if you like, but I was just interested in your comments in relation to that. Would you like to add anything further or just that they should acknowledging the abuse?

**Prof. PARER** — I am not sure what can assist the church to come to terms with this. I mean, it is almost as if there is a blockage — they are protecting so much. Perhaps I do not want to say it — I do want to say it — but the church recognises that it is the recipient of such huge government funding that it does not want to jeopardise that. Our small parish of Lumen Christi, of 166 students, gets \$1.2 million from the state government and \$300 000 from the federal government. The Catholic Church is the recipient of huge financial support in education, health and community services, which I support — it is good — but I think there is a fear they will lose some of that. I think the church has to realise that it is a member of a community and has obligations in this special area of child abuse — of reporting. That has been a blockage.

In all our enculturation and training as a priest we believe that if they are given absolution, it is forgiven — you start again — with no understanding of the whole dimensions of the psychological and the physiological input of paedophilia. How you get through that to the ACBC and bishops, I do not know.

**The CHAIR** — So the lack of acknowledgement is based on money? Is that what you are saying?

**Prof. PARER** — No, it is not only based on money, but that is a consideration, yes.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Prof. PARER** — And the fact that the bishops in Victoria say they represent 1.3 million people, and yet only one of our extended family of 26, only one participates in the church. They say that they represent 1.3 million, but they are not.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for that clarification.

**Mrs COOTE** — Michael, thank you very much indeed for a very knowledgeable and powerful and frank submission. Thank you very much indeed; it has been extremely helpful to have that on the record. I know that you spoke about celibacy and do not want to make it a huge issue, but it would be remiss of me not to tease some of this out, given your great experience of both being a priest and being successfully married for 43 years. I am very interested in the aspect you speak of where you say that as soon as you recognised celibacy and sex was not under control, you decided to leave the priesthood. My concern is: what is it that led you to believe that it was not appropriate for you, and yet all of those friends and people you were sharing rooms with et cetera at Corpus Christi did not come to the same conclusion?

**Prof. PARER** — Thank you. Look, I think that one of the elements in training at Corpus Christi is it had led to retarded maturity. I say to my wife I did not hit adolescence until I hit 30. I think that growing up in a closed community retards maturity.

We lived in the seminary an anxiety-free life. We did not have to worry about money or girls. It was a wonderful life. There was plenty of football, sport, camaraderie and friendship, and that led to a lack of development of one's maturity.

I think that what has happened since the 70s is that a hell of a lot of priests have moved out and recognised not that celibacy is the problem but that when you have a life that is not adding up and that there are problems in the professional role of the priest one of the first human elements to break loose is sexuality. It is in sleepless nights, it is in concern that you may engage in inappropriate behaviour, all sorts of things.

The first thing the archdiocese did for me was send me to Eric Seal and to Ron Conway for psychological help and so on, which led me more clearly and keenly to say, 'I may not stay in this full-time celibate life. I cannot be responsible for my future'. I faced up. Leaving the Gordon parish was one of the most difficult things I ever had to do. I loved it. It was a wonderful life and a wonderful relationship with people, yet I got to the stage of 'I must move out'.

**Mrs COOTE** — If you had those sorts of challenges, presumably others in the seminary had similar challenges. We have heard in other areas — in Ballarat, for example — that there were a number of priests living together, several of whom are ones you have mentioned, and it has been alleged that there was a paedophile ring at St Alipius. In your understanding, if you were living in a house with those people at that time, would you have understood that they were in fact perpetrating sexual abuse on children?

**Prof. PARER** — I wish I could say yes. The reality is that, apart from the one case of [text expunged, see page 3]. I had no inkling whatsoever that there were sexual problems, no inkling at all that there was any homosexuality and no inkling at all that there was anything out of line with the — what did I say? — 445 seminarians I shared those eight years with. Only one.

**Mrs COOTE** — When you talk about camaraderie and all of the people you have mentioned — as you say, you know the 21 who have been accused, and many have gone to jail — you did not see anything that was untoward about sexual relationships between them in the seminary? We have been led to believe there were very active sexual relationships at the seminary. You did not see anything that was untoward at all?

**Prof. PARER** — Not a bit. Even with people like Bill Baker, Barry Gwillim and Tony Eames — all these who have been convicted — not a one. Even when I dig deep into my memory and experience, I cannot see any incident that I can recall that indicated to me that there was such activity.

**Mrs COOTE** — I will ask one final question. We have been led to believe regarding celibacy, because the bishops recognised that it was a difficult issue for priests, that in fact it was easier to turn a blind eye to sexual abuse against children and homosexuality within the church. Would that be your understanding?

**Prof. PARER** — It would.

**Mrs COOTE** — So you believe that they turned a blind eye to it.

**Prof. PARER** — Yes. The bishops were the same. I have already mentioned that Peter Connors was 16 when he went to the seminary. I am not sure about Denis Hart, but my understanding is that he was quite young.

So many of the bishops were part of that — going in at 16; I was 18. Deceit is the word I use — a wonderful deceit; I was compliant with it — but, on looking back, it should never have been permitted.

**Mrs COOTE** — Thank you very much indeed again for your frankness. Thank you so much.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — I want to ask about the views of not the hierarchy of the church but the local practitioners. I understand that you still have contact. I think you were saying in one of your submissions that you meet monthly for fellowship. What is the view of general priests and very active parishioners within the church? Is child abuse in the Catholic Church a fairly regularly discussed issue? What do you think their view is of what is happening? Is there a change from below, or is it really just following the leadership?

**Prof. PARER** — You touch on sensitive ground. My colleague Bob Munro is here, and I believe he has put in a submission to you. We have Corpus Christi College Guys, which is the monthly meeting of guys who have been at the seminary. Bob wrote a very powerful review of Chrissie Foster's book on our network, which I responded to, and that led to the setting up of what we call For The Innocent, a subgroup within it. As I say, it is sensitive ground, but I do want to say that the general body of those CCC Guys preferred that For The Innocent move out into a separate group, not to be part of the wider group.

I think that all of us find priestly paedophilia so foreign to all our training and upbringing that we want to turn away. We do not want to believe it. It is only when confronted with people like Chrissie Foster and people like the victims of Ron Pickering especially — horrific stories — and [text expunged, see page 3] that you are forced to change your mind.

In our group, For The Innocent, there is a great effort made for our members to visit parishes, to work with people and to try to understand it — how can they support victims of paedophilia? I think there are 363 parishes in Melbourne — it might be Victoria, I am not sure — but of those parishes I guess there are less than 10 that want to reach out and say, 'Come and help us. We would like to do something with this'.

You have to realise that today priests are so overworked. At Leongatha, Father Kooloos, who is the Sale vicar-general for justice, now looks after five parishes. [text expunged, see page 3]. But the priests do not have the space in their heads to get to this. I mean, they are marrying, they are burying, they are doing all sorts of sacramental things. It is very hard for them.

If I could add an aside, it was not in your question, but if I can. When I was in the Vatican council and the secretariat with great theologians, from Hans Kung to Edward Schillebeeckx to Yves Congar to Tom Strasky, we discussed things with the leaders of the Protestant churches. It was obvious to us that priesthood belonged to a community, and a community of people should be able to choose their own and lay hands on men, women, to preside at the Eucharist. It does not have to be an eight-year training of full-time celibate males. The future of the priesthood lies in community, and with the community laying hands on people and taking the role of Jesus out of the hands of the official hierarchy. The hierarchical church as we understand it is accepted by less than 20 per cent of Christians around the globe.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Following on from that, a lot of your recommendations and a lot of the suggestions we are hearing about in terms of child abuse are about what to do once it has been discovered, what to do once it has happened, in terms of penalties, vicarious liability and that sort of thing. What about prevention? If what is happening is there are priests who are overworked, there are not really perhaps the individuals there to oversee what is going on and to protect children, what is it that governments can do, if anything, to ensure that there is protection of children who are involved in the church?

**Prof. PARER** — I wish I had an answer. I wish I had a simple solution. But I think part of the solution is what has happened is obviously leading towards evil. Having priests separated in a place like Werribee — now in Victoria they are at Carlton, but even so you have got the majority of those students from Asian countries. I mean, the reality is the priesthood is dead. The full-time, celibate priest is dead. There are very few priests. The priesthood as we know it will not continue. We do not have to worry about how we prevent this in the future; it is already gone. We hope that Pope Frank has got some tricks up his sleeve and will lead us out of it. But at the moment the priesthood as we know it is a dying breed.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Thank you.



**Mr O'BRIEN** — Thank you, Michael. I am wanting to pick up from Mrs Coote's questioning about your experience in the seminary, which is obviously very valuable for us to understand in the state of affairs at the moment. She mentioned whether you saw anyone, and you have mentioned Ron Pickering.

**Prof. PARER** — Yes.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — We have heard of evidence of Pickering's behaviour to other seminarians and other priests, including, for example, Paul Ryan. You may have heard of Paul Ryan; I do not know if you know Paul Ryan. They both seem to have a modus operandi of ingratiating themselves with certain children and then introducing alcohol and tobacco and other taboos, in a sense, as part of their behaviour and cultivating a group of seminarians or young altar boys around them, in general terms. Did you see that sort cultivating behaviour? It is now called cultivating behaviour, but it might have been more innocently looked at at the time.

**Prof. PARER** — I had been in the seminary four years when Ron Pickering joined us. He had done half of his study somewhere else and came in as a former Anglican and was given privileges — he could smoke in his room and so on. Now we have what we call the new wing, which was about 14 rooms up near the tennis courts. I lived in one room, and four or five doors up Ron Pickering was there. So we saw a lot of each other. He was very amiable, very talkative. He was obviously 10 years older than I — a cultured gentleman, spoke English. Yes, I mean, he was good to be about; I mean, one enjoyed it. But as for sexual overtures, I have absolutely no idea.

And then when he was sent to Gardenvale my mother was very ill, and he would come and visit her and bring her the sacraments. He celebrated her funeral. I never had any idea of this. I mean, it was only after that, and, as they say, the shit hit the fan, excuse me, and a number of these families in Gardenvale, whom my mother knew and so on, the parents — I was with the ABC at this stage — would ring me up and come and see me and talk about it. And I was in disbelief. I mean, talking about, you know, him having kids climbing up a ladder into his bedroom at St James presbytery. I was totally unaware of any of this. Even when Ron was running great Gregorian chant masses on Sunday and cultivating choir boys — no idea of it. Now I link this partly to my own lack of maturity to understand these things. But, no, I had no idea of Ron Pickering.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Yes. You also give evidence that you made contact with Mr Pickering in England.

**Prof. PARER** — I did.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — And you were advised that he was not going to be extradited. Could you explained what happened there?

**Prof. PARER** — Thank you for asking me that. I mean, when I was in England, quite by chance I saw Ron. I took a note of it, and I did not go up to say, 'How are you?'; I did not have a chance. But I then went to the police in, I think it was up in Kent, and said, 'Look, that person is wanted for paedophile charges in Victoria', and they looked up their records and they said, 'Yes, we are aware of that. The records show we have requested the Victorian police — do they want to extradite him?'

So when I got back to Australia I went to — no, I did not go to the police; I went to Bernard at Broken Rites and spoke to him. He said their understanding was that the Victorian Police were aware of it but they did not have the resources to extradite him.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Do you remember the names of the police officers you spoke to in London?

**Prof. PARER** — No.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — That is okay. This last question might lead into your summation. You mentioned — and in terms of our inquiry it is fortunate — that you attended Vatican II. You also outlined your disappointment and that of others who were seeking to have celibacy revoked as a condition of priesthood. Could you outline those disappointments? I do not know the process by which Vatican II was initiated, but in your humble opinion, is it time for a Vatican III within the Catholic Church laity and organisations to discuss some of these issues?

**Prof. PARER** — I would like Pope Frank to appoint a few hundred bishops of his own rather than just have the current bishops, most of whom were appointed by JP II and BXVI and who are moulded very much in one particular theological framework. I am not sure if a Vatican council today would come up with dramatic

answers. I think we need leadership from the Pope himself, and from the reports I have read of his activity in his archdiocese in Buenos Aires I think he is very much tied with the traditional Catholic view of celibacy and will reinforce it. The one thing that will force a change in celibacy is the demise of the celibate priesthood, which is already happening.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — I know I skipped it, but could you tell us a little bit about your experiences of Vatican II and your disappointment with the celibacy outcome?

**Prof. PARER** — With celibacy the greatest disappointment was that I was in the council Aula with the non-Catholic observers, because there was a lot of talk among the bishops and at the meetings after the public sessions about celibacy; there were many, many bishops who had prepared interventions to do away with celibacy. Suddenly, at 9.30 one morning, you had Archbishop Felice, who was the secretary, come in and say, 'I am to give you a message from Paul VI. He has directed us that celibacy must be taken from any discussion at the council floor'. I was with a group of 40 or 50 non-Catholic observers and there was a visible groan. The one issue that so many people wanted discussed was taken out by the Pope.

**The CHAIR** — Michael, thank you very much indeed for your appearance before us this morning. On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for being here and providing your evidence today. It has been most helpful. Thank you again.

**Prof. PARER** — Can I just ask one other question? Is all your evidence being handed on to the royal commission?

**The CHAIR** — This is a separate inquiry to the royal commission. We will be speaking to the royal commission in due course, but they have a separate process from ours and until our report is tabled the information remains with this inquiry.

**Prof. PARER** — I would urge that they accept it.

**The CHAIR** — There is a lot of evidence on the website, Michael; all public evidence is on the website, so they can look at that as much as possible. Our report will be tabled later this year, and they will obviously be welcome to that as well.

**Prof. PARER** — Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**