



## **Resurrection for the Church?**

The recent spate of sexual abuse claims, the many investigations and damaging media reports are a time of death and despair for the Church.

The biggest despair is that this abuse has happened. That a Church whose role is to help “your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” has in fact created hell on earth for a significant number of people. The terrible sins of the abusers are compounded by Church authorities who have failed to take appropriate action and therefore multiplied those crimes.

There is no doubt that the Church is held to a higher level of scrutiny than other organisations, but that really is not surprising. We do provide a lecture on how to act ethically to millions of people every Sunday. We call it the Homily. When we don’t practice what we preach we don’t look good. Hypocrisy never goes over well with anyone.

So how does the Church move from death to new life, from despair to hope, from crucifixion to Resurrection?

The first is to admit the truth. Just as we always find it hard to say we are sorry, so do people in authority in the Church. We need to take a deep breath after that and listen to what comes back to us. The Pope said “sorry” in his letter apologising for abuse in Ireland, he then did step back and absorb the response. Unfortunately some other officials instead took a familiar line in attacking the media in a blunt or disparaging way.

The second approach we need is to be proactive in this and other issues regarding the Church. The excuse that “the Church moves in centuries” is no longer adequate. If the Church moves in centuries, it will die in decades. According to Pope Benedict, speaking in 2006, the Church is already dying in Australia. What a difference there might have been if the Church in Ireland had launched its own investigations into abuse before the Government, or the Church in most other countries had responded to Australia’s woes with sexual abuse in the 1990’s and enforced processes similar to “Towards Healing”?

We just can’t hold back and hope a next round of abuse stories won’t arise. We need a missionary zeal to contact, care for and work for justice with people who have been abused. We need to actively be a face of Jesus for these people.

We should address accountability issues in the Church, questioning why mistakes were made in not addressing abuse and how we can ensure they won't recur. We have nothing to hide if we seek the truth, even if that is an unpalatable truth at times.

Thirdly, we need to continue our witness to people. One Bishop last week explained that he felt we were in "the desert", and like Moses, we might be there for some significant time. Though I understand that these are bad times for the Church, and we feel the scourging of our backs by media and by the general public, I think the desert analogy is overwhelmed by the understanding that we are people of hope, an Easter people, filled with tremendous gifts and blessed with tremendous assets.

The Catholic Church is the world's largest spiritual organisation. We are the world's largest humanitarian organisation. We do tremendous work in Australia and around the world, meeting the needs of hundreds of millions of people in education, faith development, poverty alleviation, welfare, health and other areas. Every day we generate enormous goodwill through this witness, as individuals and institutions. People can see that even terrible scandals do not negate all the wonderful work, prayer and care which exudes from millions of saintly people every day for the good of all people in the world.

It is only from its existing treasures of goodwill and from the future goodwill it generates through its witness that the Church will fully regain its credibility with wider society. Through humble acceptance of our faults, through actively seeking out and dealing with abuse and lack of accountability past and present, and through continuing our witness even though we feel the burden of these scandals, we will find there is new life in our old Church yet. After all we are Easter people, a Church of the Resurrection of Jesus.

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