

The Royal Commission's Final Report

Last April I spoke of the Royal Commission and the abuse crisis, reflecting on what our response should be as Catholics to these painful matters. Now the Commission has released its final Report, though maybe we'd prefer not to think about it, it's important to return to the topic. As legionaries we're especially called to help support the faith of others, so it's good to have reflected on these things and to be able to speak wisely about them. (I won't repeat all I said in April but everything I say must be understood in light of my earlier comments.)

The substance of the Report's content has of course in large part been known to us already. A key point I made previously is that a moral and human response must always be ruled by *reason*, not unbridled emotion mistaken for moral righteousness. Our emotions, guided by reason, will rightly be multi-faceted – *empathy and sorrow* for the victims who suffered such grievous wrongs at the hands of Catholics and others; *anger and revulsion* at the crimes, and at the evil that invaded God's Church in this horrendous way. And in our wills, there will be *determination* to take all reasonable action to make redress where possible and to prevent such crimes in the future.

An irrational emotion that might arise (naturally enough in one sense) is *shame* – in our vanity we want to look good to others, whom we fear might irrationally associate 'all Catholics' with the crimes. It's useful to focus on this for a moment: unless we have been personally guilty in some way, this shame *is* irrational and emotionally inappropriate, and should be resisted, not indulged. There *is* a shameful past – but each of us who is innocent is only morally connected at all with the shameful perpetrators and enablers to the extent we are all one *in Christ*, whereas precisely to the extent anyone's actions are criminal and against Christ's teachings, they clearly *depart* from full unity with Christ (and with us).

Indeed, as a general principle concerning *any* evils in the Church, past or present, if we are innocent then we have no real moral 'point of contact' with *any other* Catholic's crimes or sins, such that shame would be an appropriate response for us. It's important to affirm this, since to say otherwise implies (offensively) that even victims who remain Catholic, and God the Son himself, should appropriately feel ashamed, since we are all 'connected' to the crimes in a similar way.

A related point of a 'logical' nature, though a bit abstract, is also worth being clear-headed about. As we know by both faith and reason, once someone knows the Catholic Church was founded by God as necessary for salvation, they have the moral duty of being and remaining part of it (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 14). But if (owing to the crimes of some Catholics) being Catholic was in itself cause for appropriate shame, the irrational conclusion would follow, that we rightly should feel ashamed as a direct result of doing something morally obligatory. In sum: for all these reasons, shame is simply not a morally appropriate emotional response for innocent Catholics.

It was saddening that a majority of the offenses in religious settings were in Catholic institutions. From a logical viewpoint this was not especially surprising, since the Catholic Church has operated a much greater number of institutions for children than other non-government organisations – particularly schools and residential institutions (such as

orphanages), in connection with which the greater number of offenses took place, as there was much more opportunity for abusers to offend.

In a similar way, among Protestant communities, the number of offences that took place in Salvation Army institutions was quite out of proportion to the percentage of Protestants who belong to the Salvation Army – not because Salvation Army doctrine or members are somehow off-balance compared to other Protestant communities, but simply because of their more extensive charitable commitment. What Catholics also have that the Salvation Army doesn't, of course, is the huge educational system, second only to the government system (which was outside the Royal Commission's ambit, but which may also be examined one day, as might especially benefit non-Catholic children).

This leads to another point: evil can come out of good itself, without invalidating that good. Thus no one would say that because the charitable institutions of the Catholic Church and the Salvation Army have occasioned and facilitated the evil of abuse, therefore we should get rid of charitable institutions. People do speak in a loose sort of way, saying we should do *anything* to combat child abuse, but rightfully, no one takes this absolutely literally.

We could totally abolish abuse in schools, by abolishing schools. We could totally abolish abuse in religious institutions, by abolishing religious institutions. No sensible person suggests these things, *because* we recognise the immense value of schools and religious institutions, which is not outweighed by various evils that are made possible by these good things.

But our recognition that we should not (for example) abolish schools depends on our awareness of the intrinsic value of schools. A danger to be aware of with the Royal Commission is that (well-meaningly enough) its members are making recommendations about various things (such as celibacy or confession) the intrinsic value of which they have little or no real awareness of (and so it means little to them if they damage these things).

And they're making recommendations about things that impact the salvation of souls, but without this supreme value of eternal salvation really being within their purview. This is one reason why it would be quite wrong to simply blindly accept all their recommendations: we must examine the recommendations in light of universal perspectives.

As we know, the Church has already introduced very strong safeguards in recent years. However, a further examination of the Commission's Report will doubtless guide the Church and other institutions into further ways of best ensuring that these crimes never happen again.

Innocent Catholics in the pews are no doubt weary of hearing of the topic and it is wrong for anyone to lay on all of them the expectation that it should weigh upon their personal spiritual lives into the indefinite future. Yet for us as legionaries, with the special calling to be 'spiritual warriors', any one of us can choose to take it on as a particular task, amidst all our different prayer intentions, to shoulder the load of continuing to intercede for all those impacted by this sad situation.